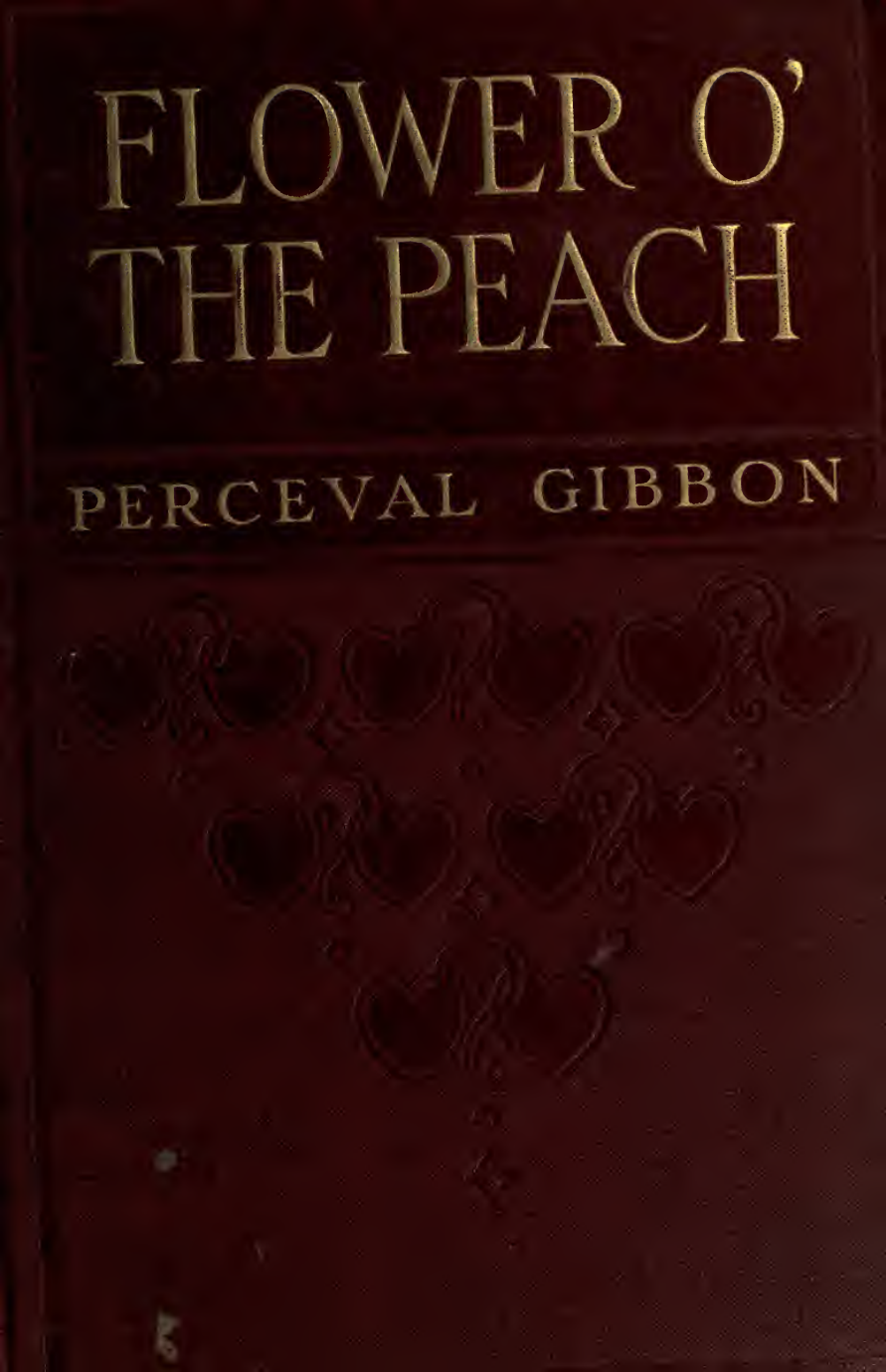
FLOWER O' THE PEACH

PERCEVAL GIBBON



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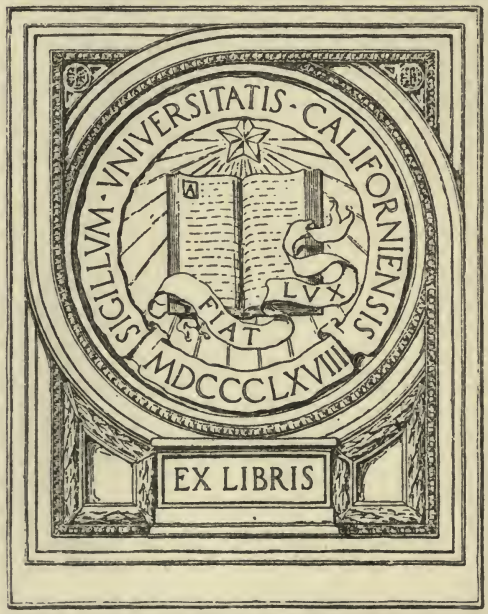

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FLOWER O' THE PEACH

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BY

PERCEVAL GIBBON

"Flower o' the peach,
Death for us all and his own life for each."

Fra Lippo Lippi.

NEW YORK
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Gift of Professor S. G. Morley

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TO

JESSIE AND JOSEPH CONRAD

THE FLOWER O' THE PEACH

FLOWER O' THE PEACH

CHAPTER I

IT was late in the afternoon when the sheep moved off, and the west was full of the sunset. They flowed out from the cactus-ringed fold like a broadening trickle of milk, with their mild idiot faces set southwards towards the sparse pastures beyond the horizon, and the dust from their feet hung over them in a haze of soft bronze. Half-way along the path between the house and the dam, Paul turned to watch their departure, dwelling with parted lips on the picture they made as they drifted forth to join themselves with earth and sky in a single mellowness of hue.

The little farmhouse with its outbuildings, and the one other house that reared its steep roof within eyeshot of the farm, were behind him as he stood; nothing interrupted the suave level of the miles stretching forth, like a sluggish sea, to the sky-line. In its sunset mood, its barren brown, the universal tint into which its poor scrub faded and was lost to the eye, was touched to warmth and softened; it was a wilderness with a soul. The tall boy, who knew it in all its aspects for a neighbor, stood gazing absorbed as the sheep came to a pause, with the lean, smooth-coated dog at their heels, and waited for the shepherd who was to drive them through the night. He was nearing seventeen years of age, and

the whole of those years had been spent on the Karoo, in the native land of dreams. The glamour of it was on his face, where the soft childish curves were not yet broken into angles, and in his gaze, as his steady unconscious eyes pored on the distance, deep with foreknowledge of the coming of the night.

"Baas!"

Paul closed his lips and turned absently. The old black shepherd was eager to linger out a minute or two in talk before he went forth to his night-long solitude. He stood, a bundle of shabby clothes, with his strong old face seamed with gray lines and the corners of the eyes bunched into puckers, waiting in the hope that the young baas might be tempted into conversation. He carried a little armory of smooth, wire-bound sticks, his equipment against all the perils of the unknown, and smiled wistfully, ingratiatingly, up into Paul's face.

"Well?" said the boy.

It all depended on the beginning, for if he should merely nod and turn away there would be nothing left but to follow the sheep out to the silence. The old man eyed him warily.

"Has the baas heard," he asked, "that there is a mad Kafir in the veld?"

"No," said Paul. "A mad Kafir?"

The old man nodded half a dozen times. "There is such a one," he affirmed. The thing was done; the boy would listen, and he let his sticks fall at his feet that he might have two hands to talk with. They were speaking "Kitchen Kafir," the *lingua franca* of the Cape, and since that is a sterile and colorless tongue—the embalmed corpse of the sonorous native speech—the tale would need pantomime to do it justice.

"There is such a one," repeated the shepherd. "He goes about alone, in the day and in the night, talking as he goes to companions who are not there, and laughing sometimes as though they had answered him. And that is very strange."

"Yes," said the boy slowly. His eyes traveled involuntarily to the veld brooding under the sky. "Who has seen him?" he asked.

"I have," said the shepherd, putting a big black forefinger to his own breast. "I have seen him." He held out his great hand before him, with the fingers splayed, and counted on them. "Four nights ago I saw him when the moon was rising."

"And he was mad?"

"Mad as a sheep."

Paul waited for the tale. The old man had touched his interest with the skill of a clever servant practising upon a master. A hint of mystery, of things living under the inscrutable mask of the veld, could not fail to hold him. He watched the shepherd with a kind of grave intensity as he gathered himself to tell the matter.

"The moon was rising," he said, "and it lay low above the earth, making long shadows of the stones and little bushes. The sheep were here and there, and in the middle of them was I, with a handful of fire and my blanket. It was very still, baas, for the wind was gone down, and I heard nothing at all but the ash sliding in the fire and the slow noise of the sheep eating. There was not even a jackal to stand out of sight and cry in the dark.

"Perhaps I was on the brink of sleep—perhaps I was only cloudy with thoughts—I do not know. But very

suddenly I heard singing—a voice coming nearer that sang a curious music."

"Curious!" The boy was hanging on the words. "Curious!" he repeated.

"It was a song," explained the old Kafir, "but the words of it were meaningless, just noises such as a baby makes—a babble. I listened, for I was not afraid. And soon I could hear footfalls among the stones and the singer came between me and the young moon, very great and black against the sky. It was only when he stood by my fire that I saw he was not a white man, but a Kafir. He was young, a strong young man, wearing clothes and boots." He paused. "Boots," he said again and thrust out his own bare foot, scarred and worn with much traveling. "Boots!"

In a town, it is conceivable that a Kafir may wear boots for purposes of splendor; but not on the Karoo. Paul saw the old man's point; here was an attribute of the unnatural.

"Yes," he said; "go on."

"I was sitting, with my pipe. He stood by the fire and looked down at me, and I could see by the shine of his teeth that he was smiling. But when he spoke, it was like his song—just noises, no speech at all. It was then that I began to doubt him. But I gave him greeting, and moved that he might sit down and smoke with me. He listened and shook his head gently, and spoke again with his slow soft voice in his language of the mad."

"What did it sound like?" demanded Paul.

"Baas, it sounded like English," replied the shepherd. "Yes, there are many Kafirs who speak English; the dorps are noisy with them; but there are none who

do not speak Kafir. And this man had come through the night, singing in his strange tongue, going straight forward like one that has a purpose. I and my fire stayed him only for a minute; he was not one of us; he stood, with his head on one side, smiling down, while I began to feel fear and ill-ease. I had it in my mind that this was a ghost, but of a sudden he stooped to where my bread lay—I had newly eaten my supper, and the things still lay about—and took a piece as large as this fist. He seemed to ask for it, but I could not understand him. Then he laughed and tossed something into my lap, and turned again to the night and the long shadows and the things that belong there. His feet moved among the stones and he was gone; and later I heard him singing again in the distance, till his voice dwindled and was lost."

"He threw you something," said the boy. "What was it?"

The old shepherd nodded. "I will show the baas," he said, and made search among precarious pockets. "This is it; I have not spent it."

It was a shilling, looking no larger than sixpence on the flat of his great horny palm. Paul looked at it and turned it over, sensible that something was lacking in it, since it differed in no respect from any other shilling. The magic of madness and the stolid massiveness of Queen Victoria's effigy were not easy to reconcile.

"It looks like a good one," he commented.

"It is good," said the shepherd. "But—" he paused ere he put it in its true light—"the bread was not more than a pennyworth."

A hundred yards away the waiting sheep discharged a small volley of bleats. Paul raised his head.

"Yes," he said, "the veld is full of wonderful things. But I would like to hear that language of the mad."

He nodded in token of dismissal and walked slowly on towards the dam, where the scarlet of the sky had changed the water to blood. The old shepherd picked up his sticks and went heavily after the sheep, a grotesque and laborious figure in that wonder of evening light. The smooth dog slunk towards him, snuffling in welcome; the Kafir dog is not a demonstrative animal, and his snuffle meant much. The shepherd hit him with the longest of the wire-bound sticks.

"Hup!" he grunted. "Get on!"

At the top of the dam wall, the sloping bank of earth and stones that held the water, Paul paused to watch them pass into the shifting distance, ere he went to his concerns at the foot of it. He could not have put a name to the quality in them which stirred him and held him gazing, for beauty is older than speech; but words were not needful to flavor the far prospect of even land, with the sheep moving across it, the squat, swart shape of the shepherd pacing at their heels, and the strange, soft light making the whole unreal and mysterious.

Below the dam wall, the moisture oozing through had made a space of rank grass and trailing weed-vines, and the ground underfoot was cool and damp through the longest day of sun. Here one might sit in the odor of water and watch the wind lift tall spirals of dust and chase them over the monotonous miles where the very bushes rustled like dead boughs at their passage. It had the quality of a heritage, a place where one may be aloof and yet keep an eye on the

world, and since there were no others who needed elbow-room for their dreams, Paul had it to himself. Here and there about the sloping bank, as on the walls of a gallery, his handiwork cracked and crumbled in the sun—little masks and figures of red clay which he fashioned to hold some shape that had caught his eye and stayed in it. He had an instinct for the momentary attitude, the quick, unconscious pose which is life, the bunched compact shape of a sheep grazing, the poise of a Kafir girl with a load on her head, a figure revealed in wind-blown clothes and lost in a flash. The sweet, pliant clay was his confidant; it was not the fault of the clay that he could tell it so much less than he knew.

He groped, kneeling, below a vine, and brought out the thing he had hidden there the evening before when the light failed him. A flattened stone at the foot of the wall was his table; he set the clay down tenderly and squatted beside it, with his back to the veld and all the world. It was to be the head of a negro, the negro as Paul knew him, and already the clay had shape. The shallow round of the skull was achieved; he had been feeling, darkly, gropingly, for the brutal angle of the brows that should brood like a cloud over the whole countenance. It had evaded him and baffled him; he knew how it should be, but when the time had come for him to leave it for the night, the brows still cocked themselves in a suggestion of imbecility which was heart-breaking. He turned it round, frowning a little as his habit was when he centered his faculties upon a matter; the chaos of the featureless face below the smooth head fronted him.

"*Allemachtag!*" he cried aloud, as he set eyes on it.

There was no possibility that he could be mistaken; he remembered, in their smallest exasperating detail, those brows as he had left them, taunting him as bad work will. Even now, he had but to close his eyes and he could see them, absurd and clamorous for correction. But—he stared dumbly at the clay as he realized it—since then another creator had played with it, or else the thing, left to itself, had frowned. The rampart of the brows had deepened above the empty face; Paul knew in it the darkness for which he had sought, the age-old patience quenching the spark of the soul. It was as different from what he had left as living flesh is from red clay, an inconsequent miracle.

"Somebody," said Paul, pondering over it—"somebody *knows!*"

The thing troubled him a little while, but he passed his hand over the clay, to make yet more sure of it, and the cool invitation of its softness was medicine for his wonder. He smudged the clay to a ridge in the place where the nose should be, and then, forgetting forthwith that he was the victim of a practical joke, as it seemed, played upon him by the powers of the air, he fell to work.

The colors in the west were burning low when he raised his head, disturbed by a far sound that forced itself on his ear. It was like a pulse in the air, a dull rhythmical throb faintly resonant like the beating of some great heart. He came to consciousness of it slowly, withdrawing himself unwillingly from the work under his hands, and noting with surprise that the evening light was all but gone. But the face of the negro was a step nearer completion, and even the outline of the gross mouth was there to aid the clay to

return his look. The far sound insisted; he lifted his head with mild impatience to listen to it, sighed, and tucked the unfinished head away in its hidingplace. Perhaps another night would draw out the mouth to its destined shape of empty, pitiful mirth.

The beat of the gourd-drum that hung at the farmhouse door still called, and he hastened his steps along the homeward path. It was the common manner of summons on the farm. For the European ear, the gourd sawed across, with a skin stretched over it, is empty of music, but it has the quality of sowing its flat voice over many miles, threading through the voices of nature as a snake goes through grass. Simple variants in the rhythm of the strokes adapt it to messages, and now it was calling Paul. "Paul, Paul, P-P-Paul!" it thrilled, and its summons was as plain as words. To silence it, he put fingers to his mouth and answered with a shrill, rending whistle. The gourd was silent.

His mother was in the doorway as he came through the kraals; she heard his steps and called to him.

"Paul! That you? Where you bin all this time?"

"By the dam," he answered.

"I been callin' you this half hour," she said. "Mrs. Jakes is here—she wants you."

The light from within the house showed her as a thin woman, with the shape of youth yet upon her. But the years had taken tribute of her freshness, and her small, rather vacant face was worn and faded. She wore her hair coiled upon her head in a way to frame the thin oval of the face, and there remained to her yet the slight prettiness of sharp weak gestures and little conscious attitudes. In her voice there sur-

vived the clipped accent of London; Paul had come to know it as the thing that distinguished his mother from other women. Before her marriage she had been an actress of the obscure sort to be found in the lesser touring companies, and it was when the enterprise of which she was a member had broken down at the town of Fereira that she met and married the Boer, Christian du Preez, Paul's father. She preserved from the old days a stock of photographs inscribed in dashing hands—"yours to the dregs"—"your old pal"—"yours ever most sincerely"—and so on a few cuttings from newspapers—"Miss Vivie Sinclair as Gertie Gottem was most unique," said the *Dopfontein Courant*—a touch of raucousness in her voice, and a ceaseless weary longing for the easy sham life, the foolish cheerful companions, the stimulus of the daily publicity.

She drew the boy in, sliding her arm through his, to where Mrs. Jakes sat waiting.

"Here he is at last," she said, looking up at him prettily. She often said she was glad her boy was tall enough to go into a picture, but a mother must admire her son for one thing or another.

Mrs. Jakes acknowledged Paul's arrival with a ladylike little smile. "Better late than never," she pronounced.

She was the wife of the doctor at the Sanatorium, the old Dutch house that showed its steep roofs within a couple of miles of the farm, where came in twos and threes the consumptives from England, to mend their broken lungs in the clean air of the Karoo. They came not quite so frequently nowadays, for a few that returned healed, or believing themselves to be healed,

had added to their travel-sketches of the wonderful old house and its surroundings an account of Dr. Jakes and his growing habit of withdrawing from his duties to devote himself to drink. Their tales commonly omitted to describe justly the anxious, lonely woman who labored at such times to supply his place, driving herself to contrive and arrange to keep the life of the house moving in its course, to maintain an assured countenance, and all the while to screen him from public shame and ruin. She was a wan little woman, clinging almost with desperation to those trivial mannerisms and fashions of speech which in certain worlds distinguished the lady from the mere person. She had lain of nights beside a drunken husband, she had fought with him when he would have gone out to make a show of his staggering gait and blurred speech —horrible silent battles in a candle-lit room, ending in a gasping fall and sickness—she had lied and cheated to hide the sorry truth, she had bared her soul in gratitude to her kind God that her child had died. These things as a matter of course, as women accept and belittle their martyrdom; but never in her life had she left the spoon standing in her tea-cup or mislaid her handkerchief. The true standards of her life were still inviolate.

She liked Paul because he was shy and gentle, but not well enough to talk to him without mentioning the weather first.

"The evenings are drawing out nicely," she remarked, leaning to one side in her chair to see through the door the darkness growing dense upon the veld. "It reminds me a little of a June evening in England —if only the rain holds off."

"Yes," said Paul. There would be rain in the ordinary course in three months or so, if all went well, but it was not worth while to go into the matter with Mrs. Jakes.

"We are to have another guest," the lady went on. The doctor's patients were always "guests" when she spoke of them. "A young lady this time. And that is what I came about, really."

"Mrs. Jakes wants you to go in to the station with the Cape-cart and fetch her out, Paul," explained his mother. "You 'll 'ave the first look at her. Mrs. Jakes takes her oath she *is* young."

Mrs. Jakes shuddered faintly, and looked at the floor.

"About twenty-six, I understand," she said. "About that." Her tone reproached Mrs. du Preez for a lapse of good manners. Mrs. Jakes did not understand the sprightliness of mild misstatement. She turned to Paul.

"If you could manage it," she suggested. "If it would n't be too much trouble! The doctor, I 'm sorry to say, has a touch of the sun; he is subject, you know." Her hands clasped nervously in her lap, and her face seemed blind as she beat bravely on. "The climate really does n't suit him at all; he can't stand the heat. I 've begged and prayed him to give it up and go back to private practice at home. But he considers it his duty to keep on."

"The morning train?" asked Paul.

"It *is* early," lamented Mrs. Jakes. "But we should be so much obliged."

Paul nodded. "All right," he said. "I will bring her, Mrs. Jakes."

There are transactions consecrated to the humorous point of view, landmarks in the history of laughter. Mrs. du Preez honestly believed that a youth and a girl alone in the dawn were a spectacle essentially mirthful.

"Catch him missing the chance," she said, with her slightly jarring laugh. "None of your larks, now, Paul! Promise you 'll behave!"

"Yes, mother," Paul promised gravely, and her face went blank before the clear eyes he turned upon her. Mrs. Jakes in her chair rustled her stiff dress in a wriggle of approval.

"Miss Harding is the name," she told Paul. "You 'll manage to find her? I don't know at all what she 's like, but she comes of a very good family, I believe. You can't mistake her."

"Paul knows the look of the lungy ones by now," Mrs. du Preez assured her. "Don't you, Paul? It 's lungs, of course, Mrs. Jakes?"

"Chest trouble," corrected Mrs. Jakes, nervously. She preferred the less exact phrase, for there is indelicacy in localising diseases, and from the lungs to the bowels it is but a step. "Chest trouble, a slight attack. Fortunately, Miss Harding is taking it in time. The doctor lays stress on the necessity for taking it in time."

"Well," said Mrs. du Preez, "whatever it is, she 'll 'ave the fashions. Lungs or liver, they 've got to dress, and it 'll be something to see a frock again. She 's from London, you said?"

Mrs. Jakes rearranged her black skirts which had suffered by implication, and suppressed an impulse to reply that she had *not* said London.

"The address is Kensington," she answered. "Very good people live in Kensington."

"There 's shops there, at any rate," said Mrs. du Preez. "Lord, don't I remember 'em! I had lodgings at Hammersmith once myself, and an aunt in the High Street. There 's not much you can tell me about that part."

She nodded a challenge to Mrs. Jakes, who shrank from it.

"Then I can tell the doctor that you 'll meet Miss Harding?" Mrs. Jakes asked Paul. "He will be so obliged. You see, he 'd go himself, only—you *quite* see? Then I 'll expect Miss Harding for breakfast."

She rose and shook herself, the gentle expert shake that settles a woman's clothes into their place, and tendered him a vague, black-gloved hand. Gloves were among her defenses against the crudities of the Karoo. She was prim in the lamp-light, and extraordinarily detached from the little uncomfortable room, with its pale old photographs of forgotten actors staring down from wall and mantel.

"She may as well see you first," she said, and smiled at him as though there were an understanding between them.

CHAPTER II

AT three o'clock in the morning it was still dark, though in the east, low down and gradual, there paled an apprehension of the dawn. From the driving-seat of the high two-wheeled cart, Paul looked forward over the heads of his horses to where the station lights were blurred like a luminous bead on the thread of railway that sliced without a curve from sky to sky. It was the humblest of halting places, with no town at its back to feed the big trains; it owed its existence frankly to a gaunt water-tank for the refreshment of engines. But for Paul it had the significance of a threshold. He could lose himself in the crowding impressions of a train's arrival, as it broadened and grew out of the distance and bore down between the narrow platforms, immense and portentous, and thudded to a standstill as though impatient of the trivial delay. The smell of it, the dull shine of glass and varnish, were linked in his mind with the names of strange, distant cities; it was freighted with the romance of far travel. There were glimpses of cushioned interiors, and tired faces that looked from the windows, giving a perfunctory glance to the Karoo which Paul knew as the world. And once he had watched four men, with a little folding table cramped between their knees, playing cards, low-voiced, alert, each dark predatory face marked with an impassivity that was like the sheath that hides a blade. He stared

at them fascinated; not once did they raise their eyes to glance through the window, nor for an instant did one of them slacken his profound attention. Ahead, at the platform's end, the great engine whined like a child that gropes for the breast, till the feed-hose contented it and its gurgle-gurgle succeeded to the thin wail of the steam. The Kafir orange woman made melodious offers of *naartjes* and a hammer clinked critically along the wheels. It was the live season of the day, the poignant moment, its amends for the slow empty hours. But the men about the table had graver concerns. The feed-hose splashed back out of the way, the guard shouted, the brakes whanged loose. The long train jolted and slid, and still they had not looked up. Paul could not leave them; he even ran along the platform till their window distanced him, and then stopped, panting, to watch the tail of the train sink to the horizon. He had seen the Jew in earnest and it left him daunted.

"They would n't even look," he was saying, as he went back to his cart. "They would n't even look." It served as a revelation to one who looked so much and so fervently.

The other train, which came and went before the daylight, had its equal quality of a swift, brief visitor, and the further mystery of windows lighted dimly through drawn curtains, whereon surprising shadow heads would dawn and vanish in abrupt motion. It was strange to stand beside one and hear from within the crying of an infant and the soothing of a mother, both invisible, arriving from the void on one hand and bound for the void on the other, with the Karoo not even an incident in their passage. Paul won-

dered whether one day that infant might not pass through again, with trousers and a mustache and a cigar, and another trouble to perturb him and cards and partners to do the soothing.

He arrived well in advance of the time of the train, and tied his docile horses to the hitching rail beside the road. Within the station there was the usual expectant group under the dim lamps, the two or three men who attended to the tank, a Cape Mounted Policeman, spurred and trim, and a few others, besides the half-dozen or so mute and timid Kafirs who lounged at the end of the platform. The white men talked together and shivered at the cold of the night; only the Cape Policeman, secure in his uniform great-coat, stood with legs astraddle and his whip held behind his back, a model of correct military demeanor in the small hours. Paul noted the aggressive beauty of his attitude and his fine young virility, and stared somewhat till the armed man noticed it.

"Well, young feller," he drawled. "You haven't fallen in love with me, have you?"

"No," answered Paul, astonished.

Two or three of the bystanders laughed, and made him uncomfortable. He did not fully understand why he had been spoken to, and stared at his questioner a little helplessly. The policeman smacked his boot with his whip.

"Nor yet me with you," he said. "So if you want to stare, go and stare at something else. See?"

Paul backed away, angry and shy, and moved down the platform to be out of the sound of their voices. The things that people laughed at were seldom clear to him; it seemed that he had been left out of some

understanding to take certain things as funny and laugh at them. His mother's mirth, breaking startlingly out of unexpected incidents, out of words spoken without afterthought, out of little accidents and breakages, always puzzled him. It was as little to be understood as her tears, when she would sit silent through a long afternoon of stagnant heat, and burst suddenly into weeping when some one spoke to her.

He came to a standstill at the point where the station roof ended and left the platform bare to the calm skies. The metals gleamed before his feet, ranging out to the veld whence the train would come. He listened for the sound of it, the low drum-note so like the call of the gourd-drum at the farmhouse door, which would herald it even before its funnel dragged its glare into view. There was nothing to be heard, and he turned to the Kafirs behind him, and spoke to one who squatted against the wall apart from the rest.

"Is the train late?" he asked, in the "Kitchen Kafir" of his everyday commerce with natives.

The black man raised his head at the question, but did not answer. Paul repeated it a little louder.

The native held his head as if he listened closely or were deaf. Then he smiled, his white teeth gleaming in the black circle of his shadowed face.

"I 'm sorry," he answered, distinctly; "I can't understand what you say. You 'll have to speak English."

It was the voice of a negro, always vaguely musical, and running to soft full tones, but there was a note in it which made it remarkable and unfamiliar, some turn which suggested (to Paul, at any rate) that this

was a man with properties even stranger than his speaking English. He thrilled with a sense of adventure, for this, of course, was the mad creature of the shepherd's tale, who sang to himself of nights when the moon rose on the veld. If a dog had answered him in set phrases, it would not have been more amazing than to hear that precise, aptly modulated voice reply in easy English from the mouth of a Kafir.

"I—I 've heard of you," he said, stammering.

"Have you?" He remembered how the old shepherd had spoken of the man's smile. He was smiling now, looking up at Paul.

"You 've heard of me—I wonder what you 've heard. And *I 've* seen you, too."

"Where did you see me? Who are you?" asked Paul quickly. The man was mad, according to the shepherd, but Paul was not very clear as to what it meant to be mad, beyond that it enabled one to see things unseen by the sane.

The Kafir turned over, and rose stiffly to his feet, like a man spent with fatigue.

"They 'll wonder if they see me sitting down while I talk to you," he said, with a motion to the group about the Cape Mounted Policeman. His gesture made a confidant of Paul and enlisted him, as it were, in a conspiracy to keep up appearances. It was possible to see him when he stood on his feet, a young man, as tall as the boy, with a skin of warm Kafir black. But the face, the foolish, tragic mask of the negro, shaped for gross, easy emotions, blunted on the grindstone of the races of mankind, was almost unexpected. Paul stared dumbly, trying to link it on some plane of reason with the quiet, schooled voice.

"What was it you were asking me?" the Kafir inquired.

But Paul had forgotten. "Don't you speak anything but English?" he demanded now.

The Kafir smiled again. "A little French," he replied. "Nothing to speak of." He saw that the lad was bewildered, and turned grave at once. "Don't be frightened," he said quickly. "There 's nothing to be frightened of."

Paul shook his head. "I 'm not frightened," he answered slowly. "It 's not that. But—you said you had seen me before?"

"Yes," the Kafir nodded. "One evening about a fortnight ago; you did n't notice me. I was walking on the veld, and I came by a dam, with somebody sitting under the wall and trying to model in clay."

"Oh!" Paul was suddenly illuminated.

"Yes. I 'd have spoken to you then, only you seemed so busy," said the Kafir. "Besides, I did n't know how you 'd take it. But I went there later on and had a look at the things you 'd made. That 's how I saw you."

"Then," said Paul, "it was *you*—"

"Hush!" The Kafir touched him warningly on the arm, for the Cape Policeman had turned at his raised voice to look towards them. "Not so loud. You mean the head? Yes, I went on with it a bit. I hope you did n't mind."

"No," replied Paul. "I did n't mind. No!"

His mind beat helplessly among these incongruities; only one thing was clear; here was a man who could shape things in clay. Upon the brink of that world of which the station was a door, he had encountered

a kindred spirit. The thought made him tremble; it was so vital a matter that he could not stay to consider that the spirit was caged in a black skin. The single fact engrossed him to the exclusion of all the other factors in the situation, just as some sight about the farm would strike him while at work, and hold him, absorbed and forgetful of all else, till either its interest was exhausted or he was recalled to his task by a shout across the kraals.

"I did n't mind at all," he replied. "How did you do it? I tried, but it would n't come."

"You were n't quite sure what you were trying for," said the Kafir. "Was n't that it?"

"Was it?" wondered Paul.

"I think so." The Kafir's smile shone out again. "Once you 're sure what you mean to do, it 's easy. If I had a piece of clay, I 'd show you. There 's a way of thumbing it up, just a trick, you know—"

"I 'm there every evening," said Paul eagerly. "But tell me: *do* other people make things out of clay, too —over there?"

His arm pointed along the railway; the gesture comprehended sweepingly the cities and habitations of men. The idea that there was a science of fingering clay, that it was practised and studied, excited him wildly.

"Gently!" warned the Kafir. He looked at the boy curiously. "Yes," he said. "Lots of people do it, and lots more go to look at the things they make and talk about them. People pay money to learn to do it, and there are great schools where they are taught to model—to make things, you know, in clay, and stone, and bronze. Did you think it was all done behind dam walls?"

Paul breathed deep. "I did n't know," he murmured.

"Do you know Capetown?" asked the other. "No? It does n't matter. You 've heard of Jan van Riebeck, though?"

As it happened, Paul had heard of the Surgeon of the Fleet who first carried dominion to the shadow of Table Mountain.

"Well," said the Kafir, "you can imagine Jan van Riebeck, shaped in bronze, standing on a high pedestal at the foot of a great street, with the water of the bay behind him, where his ships used to float, and his strong Dutch face lifted to look up to Table Mountain, as it was when he landed? Don't think of the bronze shape; think of the man. That 's what clay is for —to make things like that!"

"Yes, yes. That 's what it 's for," cried Paul. "But—I never saw anything like that."

"Plenty of time," said the other. "And that 's only one of the things to see. In London—"

"You 've been in London?" asked Paul quickly.

"Yes," said the Kafir, nodding. "Why?"

Paul was silent for a space of seconds. When he answered it was in a low voice.

"I 've seen nothing," he said. "I can't find out those ways to work the clay. But—but if somebody would just show me, just teach me those—those tricks you spoke about—"

"All right." The Kafir patted his arm. "Under the dam wall, eh? In the evenings? I 'll come, and then—"

"What?" said Paul eagerly, for he had broken off abruptly.

"The train," said the Kafir, pointing, and sighed.

Paul had been too intent in talk to hear it, but he could see now, floating against the distance, the bead of light which grew while he watched. The group further down the platform dissolved, and the tank-men went past at a run to their work. A voice at his elbow made Paul turn quickly. It was the Cape Mounted Policeman.

"You 're not having any trouble with this nigger, hey?" he demanded.

"No," said Paul, flushing. The Kafir bit off a smile and stood submissive, with an eye on the boy's troubled face.

"You don't want to let them get fresh with you," said the policeman. "I 've been keepin' my eye on him and he talks too much. Have you finished with him now?"

His silver-headed whip came out from behind his back ready to dismiss the negro in the accepted manner. Paul trembled and took a step which brought him near enough to seize the whip if it should flick back for the cut.

"Let him alone," he said wrathfully. "Mind your own business."

"Eh?" the policeman was astonished.

"You let him alone," repeated Paul, bracing himself nervously for combat, and ready to cry because he could not keep from trembling. He had never come to blows in his life, but he meant to now. The policeman stared at him, and laughed harshly.

"He 's a friend of yours, I suppose," he suggested, striving for a monstrous affront.

"Yes," retorted Paul hotly, "he is."

For a moment it looked as though the policeman, out-

raged in the deepest recesses of his nature, would burst a blood vessel or cry for help. A man whose prayer that he may be damned is granted on the nail could scarcely have looked less shocked. He recovered himself with a gulp.

"Oh, he is, is he? A friend of yours? A nigger!" Then, with a swelling of rage he dodged Paul's grasping hand and swung the whip. "I 'll teach him to—"

He came to a stop, open-mouthed. The Kafir was gone. He had slipped away unheard while they quarreled, and the effect of it was like a conjuring trick. Even Paul gaped at the place where he had been and now was not.

"Blimy!" said the policeman, reduced to an expression of his civilian days, and vented a short bark of laughter. "And *so,* young feller, he 's a friend o' yours, is he? Now, lemme give you just a word of advice."

His young, sun-roughened face was almost paternal for a moment, and Paul shook with a yearning to murder him, to do anything that would wipe the self-satisfaction from it. He sought furiously for a form of anathema that would shatter the man.

"Go to hell," he cried.

"Oh, well," said the policeman, tolerantly, and then the train's magnificent uproar of arrival gave Paul an opportunity to be rid of him.

In the complication of events Paul had all but forgotten his duty of discovering the young lady with "chest trouble," and now he wondered rather dolefully how to set about it. He stood back to watch the carriage windows flow past. Would it be at all possible just to stand where he was and shout "Miss

Harding'' till she answered? To do that needed some one more like the policeman and less like Paul; the mere thought of it was embarrassing. The alternative was, to wait until such passengers as alighted—they would not be many—had taken themselves away, and then to go up to the one that remained and say, ''Is your name Miss Harding, if you please?'' But supposing she answered, ''Mind your own business!''

The train settled and stood, and Paul became aware that from the carriage nearest him a woman was looking forth, with her face in the full light of a lamp. The inveterate picture-seeker in him suddenly found her engrossing, as she leaned a little forward, lifting her face to the soft meager light, and framed in the varnished wood of the window. It was a pale face, with that delicacy and luster of pallor which make rose tints seem over-robust. It was grave and composed; there was something there which the boy, in his innocence, found at once inscrutable and pitiful, like the bravery of a little child. Distinctly, this was a day of surprises; it came to him that he had not known that the world had women like this. His eyes, always the stronghold of dreams, devoured her, unconscious that she was returning his gaze. Perhaps to her, he also was a source of surprise, with his face rapt and vague, his slender boyishness, his general quality of standing always a little aloof from his surroundings. On the Karoo, people said of him that he was ''old-fashioned''; one word is as good as another when folk understand each other. The point was that it was necessary to find some term to set Paul apart from themselves.

He saw the girl was making preparations to leave

the carriage, and was suddenly inspired. He found the handle of the door and jerked it open, and there she was above him, and looking down. She wore some kind of scent, very faint and elusive; he was conscious of her as a near and gentle and fragrant personality.

"I hope," he said, letting the words come, "I hope you are Miss Harding?"

The girl smiled. It had been prettily spoken, with the accent of sincerity.

"Yes," she answered. "You have come to meet me?"

The thing about her to which Paul could put no name was that she was finished, a complete and perfect product of a special life, which, whatever its defects and shortcomings, is yet able to put a polish of considerable wearing qualities on its practitioners. She knew her effect; her education had revealed it to her early; she was aware of the pale, intent figure she cut, and her appearance of enlightened virginity. The reverence in the boy's eyes touched her and warmed her at once; it was a charming welcome at the end of that night's journey. Paul's guilelessness had served the specious ends of tact, for to corroborate a woman's opinion of herself is the sublime compliment.

He received the lesser luggage which she handed down to him and then she came down herself, and one train, at least, had shed its marvel upon the Karoo. She was not less wonderful and foreign on the platform than she had been at the window; the Cape Policeman, coming past again, lost his military-man air of a connoisseur in women and stiffened to a strutting perfection of demeanor at sight of her. South Africa is still so short of women that it makes the most of

those it can get, both as goddesses and as beasts of burden. Paul was free of the evil civilized habit of thinking while he could feel, and the girl had to despatch the single lanky porter for her baggage herself and attend to having it stacked at the back of the cart. Then she was beside him, with the poignant air from the open south fresh on their faces, and the empty veld before them. The slow dawn was suddenly magical and the stillness was the hush that attends miracles.

He had to give his mind to steering the big cart through the gateway to the road, and it was here that he saw, against the white fence, a waiting figure that looked up and was silent. He bent forward and waved his hand, but the Kafir did not respond. The girl at his side broke silence in her low rich voice.

"That was a native, was n't it?" she asked.

Paul looked at her. "It was a—a friend of mine," he answered seriously. "A Kafir, you know."

The light in the eastern sky had grown and its lower edge, against the rim of the earth, was tinged with a rose-and-bronze presentiment of the sunrise. The Karoo lay under a twilight, with the night stripping from its face like a veil drawn westwards and away. In that half-light, its spacious level, its stillness, its quality of a desert, were enhanced; its few and little inequalities were smoothed out and merged in one empty flatness, and the sky stood over in a single arch, sprinkled with stars that were already burning pale. In all the vast expanse before them, there rose no roof, no tree, no token of human habitation; the eye that wandered forward, returned, like the dove to the Ark, for lack of a resting-place. It was a world at

gaze, brooding grimly. The little morning wind, which would die when the sun rose clear of the horizon and leave the veld to its day-long torpor of heat, leaned upon their faces; the girl raised her brows against it and breathed deeply of its buoyancy.

"Oh," she said; "this is what I came for."

"The air?" Paul glanced sideways at her clear profile set against the shadowy morning. "They say it is good for—for—"

He hesitated; Mrs. Jakes had managed to make the word difficult. But Miss Harding took it in her stride.

"For the lungs?" she suggested without compunction. "Yes, I 'm sure it is. And you live here all the time, do you?"

"I was born here," Paul answered.

"How you must love it," she said, and met his eyes with a look in which there was a certain curiosity. "All this, I mean," she explained. Then: "But do you?"

"Yes," he answered. "It 's—it 's fine to look at—if you like looking at things."

It was not all that he desired to say, for he was newly eager to make himself clear to this wonderful person at his side, and he felt that he was not doing himself justice. But Miss Harding had seen inarticulate souls before, aching to be confidential and to make revelations and unable to run their trouble into a mould of speech. They were not uncommon in the neighborhood of her address in Kensington. She smiled her recognition of the phenomenon. "There are not many kinds of men, and only two kinds of boy," she said to herself. She was twenty-six, and she knew.

"Oh, I," she answered. "Yes, I like looking at things."

Paul nodded, watching his horses. "I was sure you did when I saw you at the window," he said. He turned to her, and she smiled at him, interested in the strong simplicity with which he spoke.

"I was sure," he repeated, "and yet nobody like you ever came here before, ever. They always went on in the train. I used to wonder if one of them would never get out, but they never did. They just sat still by the window, with their faces tired and sleepy, and went on again."

He loosed the lash of his whip, and it made lightning circles over the off horse, and the tail of the lash slapped that animal reproachfully on the neck. Miss Harding contented herself with a little incoherent noise of general sympathy. "If I say anything," she thought, "I 'll be knocked off my seat with a compliment."

But Paul had only wanted to tell her; it seemed necessary that she should know something of her value. That done, he was content to drive on in dreaming silence, while the pair of them watched the veld grow momentarily lighter, its bare earth, the very hue and texture of barrenness, spreading and widening before them like water spilt on a floor. The stronger light that showed it to them revealed only a larger vacancy, a void extending where the darkness had stood like a presence. Beside the cart, and no more than a dozen yards away, a heavy bird suddenly uttered a cry and spouted up into the air, with laborious wings, flapping noisily. It rose perhaps thirty feet, with an appearance of great effort, whistled and sank again forthwith. The girl laughed; it was such a futile performance.

"What was that?" she asked.

"A lark," was the answer, and Paul turned his eyes to the east. "Look!" he bade her, pointing.

Over the horizon which was like a black bar, set rigid against the heavens, stood the upper edge of the sun, naked and red,—a fiery eye, cocked arrogantly over the sky-line. About it, the very air seemed flooded with color, and the veld reflected it in dull gleams of red.

"And there!" said Paul again, pointing ahead.

They were at the top of a gentle slope, so gradual that it had made no break in the flat prospect of ten minutes ago, and before them, and still so far off that it had the appearance of a delicate and elaborate toy, stood the Sanatorium. In that diamond clearness of air, every detail of it was apparent. Its beautiful serene front, crowned by old Dutch gables mounting in steps to the height of the rooftree, faced them, frank and fair, over the shadowy reticence of the stone-pillared *stoep*. Beyond and behind it, the roof of the farm, Paul's home, stood in a dim perspective.

"Is that it?" asked Miss Harding. "Where I am going, I mean."

"Yes," said Paul.

"It 's very beautiful," she said.

He smiled contentedly. "I was sure you would say that," he replied. "I am so glad you have come here."

Miss Harding regarded him doubtfully, but decided that no rebuke was necessary.

"Yes," she said, soberly. "It ought to give my lungs a chance."

Paul flicked the long lash towards the off horse again, and spoke no more till he brought the cart to a standstill at the foot of the fan-shaped flight of steps that

led up to the door on the stoep. The big house was voiceless and its windows blank; he was preparing to call out when the front door opened, uncovering a vista of a stone corridor within, simple and splendid, and there emerged Mrs. Jakes to the glory of the new day. She crossed the stoep, challenging the dignity of smooth cold stone with her little black figure of ceremony and her amiable, empty face of formal welcome.

"Miss Harding?" she enquired. "I scarcely expected you so early. Isn't it charming weather?"

Paul helped the girl to alight, and watched the two women as they stood, before entering the house, and exchanged perfunctory civilities.

"And now, to see your room," said Mrs. Jakes at last, and let her pass. "Isn't it fortunate that the rain has held off so nicely?"

Her small voice tinkled indefatigably, and she worked through all the motions of hospitable politeness. But behind her smile her eyes were haggard and stale, and Paul thought that she looked at the girl, as they went in, with the very hate of envy.

CHAPTER III

IN the years of his innocence, when the art and practice of medicine were rich with enticements like a bride, Dr. Jakes had taken his dreams in hand to mold them to the shape of his desire. A vision had beckoned to him across the roofs and telegraph wires of South London, where he scuffled for a livelihood as the assistant of a general practitioner; and when he fixed his eyes upon it, it spread and took shape as a great quiet house, noble and gray, harboring within its sober walls the atmosphere of distinguished repose which goes with a practice of the very highest class. Nothing of all its sumptuous appointment was quite so clear to him as that flavor of footfalls muffled and voices subdued; to summon it was to establish a refuge in which he might have brief ease between a tooth-drawing and a confinement. Kindly people who excused a certain want of alacrity in the little doctor by the reflection that he was called out every night might have saved their charity; his droop, his vacancy were only a screen for the splendid hush and shadow of that great visionary mansion. It was peopled, too, with many dim folk, resident patients in attitudes of relaxation; and among them, delicate and urbane, went Dr. Jakes, the sweet and polished vehicle of healing for the pulmonary complaints of the well-bred. Nor was there lacking a lady, rather ghostlike and faint in conformity with the dreamer's ideal of the highest expression of a lady-

like quality, but touched, none the less, with warm femininity, an angel and a houri in one, and answering, in the voice of refinement, to the title of Mrs. Jakes.

She had no Christian name then; she was a haunting mellowness, a presence delicate and uplifting. In the murk of the early morning, after a night spent behind drawn blinds in a narrow, tragic room, where another human being entered the world between his hands, he would go home along empty furtive streets, conscious of the comfort of her and glad as with wine, and in such hours he would make it clear to himself that she, at any rate, should never bear a child.

"No," he would say, half aloud and very seriously. "No; it 's not in the part. No!"

That gracious and mild presence—he did not entirely lose it even when its place was assailed by the advent of the timid and amiable lady whom he married. She was a daughter of the landed interest; her father owned "weekly property" about Clapham Junction, two streets of forlorn little houses, which rang day and night with the passing of trains, and furnished to the population a constant supply of unwelcome babies. Dr. Jakes knew the value of property of that kind, and perhaps his knowledge did something to quicken his interest in a sallow, meager girl whom he encountered in the house of his employer. She brought him a thousand pounds in money, means ready to his hand to anchor the old vision to earth and run it on commercial lines; it puzzled him a little that the vision no longer responded to his summons so readily as of old. It had degenerated from an inspiration to a mere scheme, best expressed in the language of the prospectus; the fine zest of it was gone beyond recovery. There was no recap-

turing its gentle languors, the brooding silence of it; still less was it possible when, by the mere momentum of his plans, he had moved to South Africa and found him a house, to reproduce that reposefulness as the main character of the establishment. Such effects as he gained, during the brief strenuousness that he manifested on taking possession, were the merest caricatures of the splendid original, mocking his impotence. The thousand pounds, too, which at first had some of the fine, vague, inexhaustible quality of a dream, proved inelastic, and by the time the baby came, Dr. Jakes was already buying whisky by the case. The baby was a brief incident, a caller rather than a visitor, so ephemeral that it was scarcely a nuisance before it departed again in search of a peace less dependent on the arrangement of furniture than that which Dr. Jakes had sought to bring into being.

All life is a compromise; between the dream and the exigencies of Dr. Jakes' position the Sanatorium had emerged. The fine, simple, old house had an air of its own, which no base use could entirely destroy. Its flat front, pedestaled upon a wide, flagged stoep, faced to the southeast and made a stronghold of shade in the noonday vehemence of the sun. Its rooms were great and low, with wide solemn windows regarding the monotony of the level veld; they stood between straight corridors where one's footsteps rang as one walked. The art of its builders had so fashioned it that it stood on the naked ground like a thing native to it, not interrupting nor affronting that sweep of vacant miles, but enhancing it. The stolid Dutch builders knew how to make their profit out of wide horizons. They had conceived a frame for lives which should ripen in face

of the Karoo, gleaming on its barrenness a measure of its tranquillity. They built a home; and of it Dr. Jakes had made a Home.

There remained yet, of all the decorous and ceremonial processes which were to maintain and give color to the life of the Sanatorium as he had conceived it of old, only one function. The two men patients who were left to him did as they pleased in most respects, but if they took tea in the afternoon they took it from Mrs. Jakes in the drawing-room after an established usage, with formal handing to and fro of plates and cups in the manner of civilized society. Jakes was seldom too unwell to be present at this function, and it was here, with his household at his back, that Margaret saw him first.

Weariness had come upon her with the rush of an overtaking pursuer as Mrs. Jakes brought her into the house and away from the spreading dawn, and that lady had cut short the forms of politeness to bid her go to bed. She woke to the warmth of afternoon and the glow of its sun slanting upon the floor of her room and was aware at once of a genial presence. At the window a tall, stout Kafir woman, her head bound in a red and yellow handkerchief in a fashion which reminded Margaret of pictures of pirates, was tweaking the tails of the spring-blinds and taking delight in watching them run up with a whir and click. She turned at the sound of Margaret's movement, and flashed a brilliant smile upon her.

"Missis sleeping too long," she observed. "Tea now."

The mere good humor of her was infectious and Margaret smiled in return.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Me? Fat Mary," was the answer. She laughed easily, willing to make or be a joke according to Margaret's humor. "Fat Mary, because—" she sought for a word in the unfamiliar English and then gave it up. "Because," she repeated, and traced her ample circumference with a black finger. "You see?"

"I see," said Margaret, and prepared to get up.

Her long sleep had restored her and there was comfort, too, in waking to the willing humanity of Fat Mary's smiles, instead of to the starched cuffs and starched countenance of some formal trained and mechanical nurse. Fat Mary was not a deft maid; she was too easily amused at niceties of the toilet, and Margaret could not help feeling that she regarded the process of dressing as a performance which she could discuss later with her friends; but at least she was interested. She revolved helpfully about the girl, to the noise of bumped furniture and of large bare feet scraping on the mats, like a bulky planet about a wan and diminutive sun, and made mistakes and laughed and was buoyant and alight with smiles—all with a suggestion of gentle and reverent playfulness such as a more than usually grown person might use with a child.

"Too much clothes," was her final comment, when Margaret at last was ready and stood, slim and sober, under her inspection. "Like bundles," she added, thoughtfully. "But Missis is skinny."

"Where do we go now?" asked Margaret.

"Tea," replied Fat Mary, and led the way downstairs by a wide and noble staircase to the gray shadows of the stone hall. There was a simple splendor about the house which roused the connoisseur in Margaret, a

grandeur which was all of proportion and mass, and the few articles of furniture which stood about were dim and shabby in contrast to it. She had only time to note so much when Fat Mary opened a door for her, and she was facing across a wide room to broad windows flooded with sunlight and aware of Mrs. Jakes rising from behind a little tea-table and coming forward to meet her. Two men, a young one and an old one, rose from their chairs near the window as she entered, and a third was standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to the empty hearth.

"Quite rested now?" Mrs. Jakes was asking. "You 've had a nice long sleep. Let me introduce the doctor. Eustace—this is Miss Harding."

Dr. Jakes advanced from the hearth-rug; Margaret thought he started forward rather abruptly as his name was spoken. He gave her a loose, hot hand.

"Charmed," he said in a voice that was not quite free from hoarseness. "We were just out of ladies, Miss Harding. This is a great pleasure; a great pleasure."

"Thank you," murmured Margaret vaguely.

He was a short plump man, with a big head and round spectacles that gave him the aspect of a large, deliberate bird. He was dressed for the afternoon in formal black, the uniform of his calling, though the window framed shimmering vistas of heat. He peered up at her with a sort of appeal on his plump, amiable face, as though he were conscious of that quality in him which made the girl shrink involuntarily while he held her hand, which no decent austerity of broadcloth could veil from her scrutiny. There was something about him at once sleepy and tormented, the state in

which a man lies all day full-dressed upon a bed and goes habitually unbuttoned. It was the salient character in him, and he seemed to search her face in a faint hope that she would not recognize it. He dropped her hand with a momentary knitting of his brows like the ghost of despair, and talked on.

"It 's the air we depend on," he told her. "Wonderful air here, Miss Harding—the breath of healing, you know. It does n't suit *me,* but then *I 'm* not here for my health."

He laughed uncertainly, and ceased abruptly when he saw that no one laughed with him. He was like a child in disgrace trying to win and conciliate a circle of remorseless elders.

Mrs. Jakes interrupted with a further introduction. While the doctor spoke, she had been standing by like an umpire. "Mr. Ford," she said now, and the younger of the two men by the window bowed to her without speaking across the tea-table. His back was to the window and he stood silhouetted against the golden haze which filled it, and Margaret saw only that he was tall and slender and moved with easy deliberation.

"Mr. Samson," said Mrs. Jakes next.

This was the elder man. He came forward to her, showing a thin, sophisticated old face with cloudy white eyebrows, and shook hands in a pronounced manner.

"Ah, you come like a gleam of sunshine," he announced, in a thin voice that was like a piece of bravado. "A gleam of sunshine, by gad! We 're not much to look at, Miss Harding; a set of crocks, you know—bellows to mend, and all that sort of thing, but, by gad, we 're English, and we 're glad to see a countrywoman."

He cocked his white head at her gallantly and strad-

dled his legs in their neat gray trousers with a stiff swagger.

"My mother was Irish," observed Mrs. Jakes brightly. "But Miss Harding must have some tea."

Mr. Samson skipped before to draw out a chair for her, and Margaret was established at Mrs. Jakes' elbow. The doctor came across the room to hand her bread and butter; that done, he retired again to his place on the hearth-rug and to his cup, lodged upon the mantel-shelf. It seemed that this was his place, outside the circle by the window.

"Charming weather we 're having," announced Mrs. Jakes, conscientiously assailing an interval of silence. "If it only lasts!"

Mr. Samson, with his back to the wall and his teacup wavering in his thin hand, snorted.

"Weather!" he said. "Ya-as, we do get weather. 'Bout all we do get here,—eh, Jakes?"

Behind Margaret's back the doctor's teaspoon clinked in his saucer, and he said something indistinct, in which the words "wonderful air" alone reached her. She hitched her chair a pace sideways, so as to see him.

Mrs. Jakes was looking over her with the acute eyes of a shopper which took in and estimated each detail of her raiment.

"I suppose, now," she remarked thoughtfully, "in England, the spring fashions were just coming out."

"I don't know, really," Margaret answered. "When I left, the principal wear seemed to be umbrellas. It 's been an awful winter—rain every day."

"Aha!" Mr. Samson returned to the charge. "Rain, eh? Cab-wheels squirting mud at you all along the street, eh? Trees blubbering over the railings like

bally babies, eh? Women bunchin' up their skirts and hoppin' over the puddles like dicky-birds, eh? I know, I know; don't I just know! How 'd you like a mouthful of that air, eh, Ford? Bad for the lungs—yes! But good, deuced good for the heart."

The young man in the window raised his head when he was addressed and nodded. From the hearth-rug Dr. Jakes murmured audibly: "Influenza."

"*That* of course," said Mrs. Jakes indulgently. "Were there many people in town, Miss Harding?"

"People!" Margaret was mystified for the moment. "Oh, yes, I think so."

She was puzzled by the general attitude of the others towards the little doctor; it was a matter into which she had yet to be initiated. It was as though there existed a tacit understanding to suffer his presence and keep an eye upon him. It conveyed to her a sense that these people knew things about him which would not bear telling, and held the key to his manner of one dully afflicted. When he moved or managed to make some small clatter in setting his cup on the mantel-shelf, Mrs. Jakes turned a swift eye upon him, inspected him suspiciously and turned away again. If he spoke, the person addressed seemed to turn his remark over and examine it for contraband meanings before making a perfunctory answer. He was like a prisoner handicapped by previous convictions or a dog conscious of a bad name. When he managed to catch the girl's eye, he gave her weak, hopeful, little smiles, and subsided quickly if any one else saw him, as though he had been caught doing some forbidden thing. The thing troubled her a little. Her malady had made a sharp interruption in her life and she had come to the Karoo

in the sure hope that there she would be restored and given a warrant to return finally to her own world and deal with it unhampered. The doctors who had bidden her go had spoken confidently of an early cure; they were smooth men who made a good show of their expert knowledge. She had looked to find such a man at her journey's end, a doctor with the marks of a doctor, his social adroitness, his personal strength and style, his confidence and superiority to the weaknesses of diseased flesh. This little man, dazed and dumb, standing apart like a child who has been put in the corner, did not realize her expectations. If medical skill, the art and dexterity of a physician, dwelt in him, they had, she reflected, fallen among thieves.

"You have only three patients here now?" she asked Mrs. Jakes.

"At present," answered Mrs. Jakes. "It 's a convenient number. The doctor, you see, can give them so much more attention than if there were a houseful. Yes, it 's really better for everybody."

As she finished, Margaret looked up and caught the eye of the young man, Ford, fixed upon her, as though he watched to see how she would take it. He was a tall youth with a dark impassive face and level brows, and his malady announced itself in a certain delicacy of coloring and general texture and in attitudes which slacked naturally to invalid languors. While the others talked, he sat on the ledge of the window, looking out to the veld prostrate under the thresh of the sun. In any talkative assembly, the silent man is at an advantage, and this tall youth seemed to sit without the little circle of desultory tongues and dwarf it by his mere aloofness. His glance now seemed to convey a hint to

her to accept, to pass over, things that needed explanation and to promise revelations at a more fitting time.

"You see," Mrs. Jakes continued, when Margaret had murmured noises of acquiescence; "you see, each patient requires his individual attention. And—" she sank her voice to a confidential undertone—"he 's not *strong.*"

She nodded past Margaret's shoulder at Jakes, who was drinking from his cup with precautions against noise. He caught her look over the rim of it and choked. Ford smiled faintly and turned to the window again.

"The Karoo does n't suit him a bit," Mrs. Jakes went on. "Too bracing, you know. He 's often quite ill. But he won't leave."

"Why?" asked Margaret. The doctor was busy with his handkerchief, removing the traces of the accident from his waistcoat.

Mrs. Jakes looked serious. "Duty," she replied, and pursed her pale lips. "He considers it his duty to remain here. It 's his life-work, you know."

Ford's eye caught Margaret's again, warning and inviting. "It 's—it 's very unselfish of him," she said.

"Yes!" said Mrs. Jakes. "It is." And she nodded at Margaret as much as to ask, "And *now,* what have you got to say?"

The doctor managed the tea stains to his satisfaction and came across the room, replacing the cup and saucer on the table with a hand that was not quite steady. In the broad light of the window, he had a strained look; one familiar with such matters would have known that the man was raw and tense with the after effects of

heavy drinking. He looked down at Margaret with an uncertain smile.

"I must have a little talk with Miss Harding," he said. "We must find out how matters stand. Will you bring her to my study presently, my dear?"

"In a quarter of an hour?" suggested Mrs. Jakes. He nodded. Ford did not turn from his idle gazing through the window and old Samson did not cease from looking at him with an arrogant fixity that seemed on the point of breaking into spoken denunciations. He looked from one to the other with a hardy little smile, then sighed and went out.

His going was the signal for the breaking up of the gathering. Old Samson coughed and walked off and Ford disappeared with him.

"And what would you care to do now?" asked Mrs. Jakes of Margaret. "I have some very good views of Windsor, if you like. You know Windsor?"

Margaret shook her head. Windsor had no attractions for her. What interested her much more was the fact that this small, bleak woman was on the defensive, patently standing guard over privacies of her life, and acutely ready to repel boarders who might endeavor to force an intimacy upon her. It was plain in the rigor of her countenance, set into a mask, and in each tone of her voice. Margaret had yet to undergo her interview with Dr. Jakes in his study, and till that was over, and she definitely enlisted for or against him, Mrs. Jakes would preserve an armed neutrality.

"I think," said Margaret, "I 'd like to go out to the veranda."

"We call it the stoep," corrected Mrs. Jakes. "A Dutch word, I believe. By all means; you 'll probably

find Mr. Ford there and I will call you when the doctor is ready."

The stone hall held its cathedral shadows inviolate, and from it Margaret went forth to a westering sun that filled the earth with light, and painted the shadow of the house in startling black upon the ground. She stood between the square pillars with their dead and ruined vines and looked forth at a land upon which the light stood stagnant. It was as though the Karoo challenged her conception of it. She had seen it last vague with the illusions of the dawn, hemmed in by mists and shadows that seemed to veil the distances and what they held. Now these were stripped from it to reveal only a vast nakedness, of red and red-brown and gray, all ardent in the afternoon sun. The shadows had promised a mystery, the light discovered a void. It ran from before her yet in a single sweep to a horizon upon which the blue of remote hills was a faint blur, and in all the far prospect of it there was not one roof, no single interruption to its still level. Margaret, quickly sensitive to the quality of her environment, gazed at it almost with a sense of awe, baffled by the fact that no words at her command were pliant enough to fit it. It was not "wild" nor "desolate" nor even "beautiful"; none of the words allotted to landscapes, with which folk are used to label the land they live upon, could be stretched to the compass of this great staring vacancy. It was outside of language; it struck a note not included in the gamut of speech. "Inhuman" came nearest to it, for the salient quality of it was something that bore no relation to the lives—and deaths—of men.

A sound of coughing recalled her from her contem-

plation of it, and she walked along the stoep towards it. Behind a pillar near the corner of the house, Ford sat on a camp-stool, with a little easel before him, and smudged with his thumb at the paint on a small canvas.

He looked up at her with no token of welcome, but rather as though he withdrew himself unwillingly from his picture.

"Well?" he said, motioning with his head at the wide prospect before them. "What d' you think of it?"

"Oh, a lot," replied Margaret, refusing to commit herself with adjectives. "Can I see?"

He sat back to give her room to look. She had in her time spent sincere days at one of the art schools which help Kensington to its character and was prepared to appreciate expertly. It was a sketch in oils, done mostly with the thumb and palette-knife, a *croûte* of the most obvious—paint piled in ridges as though the artist would have built his subject in relief upon the canvas, perspective improvised by the light of nature, crudities, brutalities of color, obtruded in the effort for breadth. They were all there. She stared into this mist of blemishes in an effort to see what the painter saw and could not set down, and had to give it up.

In the art school it had been the custom to tell one's fellows the curt, unwelcome truth.

"You can't paint," said Margaret.

"Oh, I know that," answered Ford. "You were n't looking for that, were you?"

"For what, then?" asked Margaret.

He hitched himself up to the canvas again, and began to smudge with his thumb at a mess of yellow ocre.

"There 's something in it that I can see," he said.

"I 've been watching this—this desert for more than a year, you know, and I try to get in what I see in it. You can't see anything?"

"No," said Margaret. "But I did try." She watched his unskilful handling of the ocre. "I could show you a thing or two," she suggested.

She had all a woman's love for technique, and might have been satisfied with more skill and less purpose. But Ford shook his head.

"No, thank you," he said. "It 's not worth while. I 'm only painting for myself. I know what I mean by these messes I make; if I could paint more, I might n't be so pleased with it."

"As you like, of course," said Margaret, a little disappointed.

He worked in silence for about a minute.

"You did n't like the looks of Dr. Jakes?" he suggested suddenly. "I saw you wondering at him in there."

"Well," Margaret hesitated. "He seemed rather out of it," she answered. "Is there anything—*wrong*—with him?"

Ford was making an irreparable mess of his picture and did not look up.

"Wrong?" he repeated. "Well, depends what you call wrong. He drinks."

"Drinks!" Margaret did not like the matter-of-fact way in which he said it. "Do you mean—"

"He 's a drunkard—he goes to bed drunk. His nerves were like banjo strings this afternoon; he could n't keep his hands still. You noticed it? That was last night's drinking; he did n't get to bed till daylight. I heard him struggling up the stairs, with Mrs.

Jakes whispering to him not to make a noise and helping him. That was just before you came."

"Poor thing!"

"Yes—poor thing!" Ford looked up at the girl sharply. "You 've got it, Miss Harding. It 's Mrs. Jakes that suffers. Jakes has got his liquor, and that makes up to him for a lot. You and I, we 've got—whatever we have got, little or much. Old Samson 's got his memories and his pose; he gets along all right with them. But she 's got nothing at all—only the feeling that she 's managed to screen him and prop him and fooled people into thinking she 's the wife of a decent man. That 's all."

"But," said Margaret, "is he safe?"

"Safe? Oh, I forgot that he was to see you in his study. He won't reel about and fall down, if that 's what you mean. *That* part of it is all done in private; Mrs. Jakes gets the benefit of *that*. And as to his patients, he really does know a little about lungs when he 's sober, and there 's always the air. Oh, he 's safe enough."

"It 's dreadful," said Margaret. She was at a loss; the men she knew did not get drunk. When they went to the bad, they chose different roads; this one seemed ankle-deep with defilement. She recalled Mrs. Jakes when she had come forth from the silent house to meet her in the chill dawn, and a vision flashed upon her of the vigil that must have been hers through the slow night, listening to the chink of bottle on glass and waiting, waiting in misery and fear to do that final office of helping the drunken man to his bed. Her primness, her wan gentility, her little affectations of fashion, seemed monstrously heroic in the light of that vision—she had

carried them with her to the pit of her humiliation and brought them forth again unsullied, the spotless armor of a woman of no account.

"You understand now?" asked Ford, watching her.

"Yes," answered Margaret, slowly. "But it frightens me. I wish I had n't got to see him in his study. What will he do?"

"Hush!" said Ford. "Here comes Mrs. Jakes. Don't let her hear you. He won't do anything."

He fell to his work again, and Margaret turned to receive the doctor's wife.

"The doctor will see you now, Miss Harding," said Mrs. Jakes. "Will you come with me?"

She eyed the pair of them with a suspicion she could not altogether hide, and Ford was careful to hold an impassive face.

"I am quite ready," returned Margaret, nerving herself for what had assumed the proportions of an ordeal, and went with her obediently.

Jakes' study was a small, rather dark room opening off the hall, in which the apparatus of his profession was set forth to make as much show as possible. His desk, his carpet, his leather chairs and bookcases did their best to counterfeit a due studiousness in his behalf, and a high shelf of blue and green bottles, with a microscope among them, counteracted their effect by suggesting to the irreverent that here science was "skied" while practice was hung on the line. This first interview was a convention in the case of every new patient. Dr. Jakes always saw them alone as a matter of professional honor. Mrs. Jakes would make a preliminary inspection of him to assure herself and him that he was fit for it; old Mr. Samson, passing by the half-open

door once, had seen her bending over him, smelling his breath critically; and then she would trust him to his patient's good will and to the arbitrary Providence which ruled her world.

"Miss Harding, Eustace," she announced at the door of the study and motioned the girl to enter.

The little doctor rose with bustling haste, and looked at her with melancholy eyes. There was a smell of eau de Cologne in the room, which seemed natural at the time to its rather comfortable shabbiness.

"Sit down, sit down, Miss Harding," he said, and made a business of thrusting forward one of the leather chairs to the side of his desk. Seated, she faced him across a corner of it. In the interval that had elapsed since she had seen him at tea, he seemed to have recovered himself somewhat. Some of the strain was gone from him, and he was grave with a less effect of effort and discomfort.

He put his open hand upon a paper that lay before him.

"It was Dr. Mackintosh who ordered you south?" he asked. "A clever man, Miss Harding. I have his letter here about your case. Now, I want you to answer a question or two before we listen to that lung of yours."

"Certainly," said Margaret.

She was conscious of some surprise that he should move so directly to the matter in hand. It relieved her of vague fears with which Ford's warning had filled her, and as he went on to question her searchingly, her nervousness departed. The little man who fell so far short of her ideal of a doctor knew his business; even a patient like herself, with all a patient's prejudice

and ignorance, could tell by the line his questions took that he had her case by heart. He was clearly on familiar ground, a fact which had power to reassure her, and she told herself that, after all, his resigned, plump face was not entirely repulsive.

"A queer little man," she said to herself. "Queer enough to be a genius, perhaps."

"And, now, please, we 'll just hear how things really are. No, I don't think you need undo anything. Yes, like that."

As he explored her chest and side with the stethoscope, his head was just under her face, the back of it rumpled like the head of some huge and clumsy baby. It was fluffy and innocent and comical, and Margaret smiled above him. Every one has his best aspect, or photographers would crowd the workhouses and the manufacturers of pink lampshades would starve. Dr. Jakes should have made more of the back of his head and less of his poor, uncertain face.

But he was done with the stethoscope at last, and as he raised his head his face came close to hers and the taint of his breath reached her nostrils. Suddenly she understood the eau de Cologne.

"Well," he said, sitting down again; "now we know where we are."

He had seen her little start of disgust and annoyance at the smell of him, and kept his eyes on the paper before him, playing with a corner of it between his fingers as he spoke.

"Will I get well?" asked Margaret, directly.

"Yes," he answered, without hesitating.

"I 'm glad," she said. "I 'm awfully glad. Thank you."

"I 'll see about your treatment," he said, without raising his eyes. "But I need n't keep you now. Only—"

"Yes?"

"You must n't be afraid," he continued. "Not of anything. Do you understand? You must n't be afraid."

Margaret wished he would look up. "I 'm not afraid," she answered. "Really I 'm not."

Dr. Jakes sighed and rose slowly. The trouble had descended on him again, and he looked sorry and dull.

"That 's right," he said without heartiness, and moved to open the door for her. His appealing eyes dwelt on her for a moment. "This is n't England," he added, with a heavy deliberation. "We 're none of us here because we like it. But—but don't be afraid, Miss Harding."

"I 'm sure there 's nothing to be afraid of," answered Margaret, moved—he was so mournful in his shame. He bowed to her, a slow peck of his big head, and she went.

In the hall, Mrs. Jakes met her and challenged her.

"Well," she said; "and what does the doctor say about you?"

Margaret smiled at her. "He says I shall get well, and I believe he knows," she answered.

It was as though some stiffening in Mrs. Jakes had suddenly resigned its functions. She softened before the girl's eyes.

"Of course he knows," she said contentedly. "Of course he knows. My dear, he really *does* know."

"I 'm sure he does," agreed Margaret.

Mrs. Jakes put a hand on her arm. "I feel certain we 're going to be friends," she said. "You 're so

pretty and—and distinguished. And—and what a pretty frock you 've got!''

She hesitated an instant, and was very timid and humble.

''I should *love* to see you unpack,'' she said earnestly.

CHAPTER IV

THE strength of a community, of almost any community, is its momentum; it is easier to go on than to pull up, even though its progress be erratic and the tear exceed the wear. Dr. Jakes' Sanatorium was a house divided against itself and poised for a downfall; but the course of its daily life had yet current enough to pick up a newcomer and float him from his independent foothold. The long languors of its days, its deep whispering nights, were opiates for the critical and exacting, so that before they had made it clear to themselves that this was no place for them, they were absorbed, merged in, the eventless quiet of the house and its people. For some—for most of them, indeed—there came at last a poignant day when Paul and his tall horses halted at the door to carry them to the station, and it was strange with what a reluctance they rode finally across the horizon that rose up to shut the big gray house from view, and how they hesitated and frowned and talked curtly when the station opened out before them and offered them the freedom of the world. And for the others, those who traveled the longer journey and alone, there stood upon the veld, a mile from the house, an enclosure of barbed wire—barbed against—what? For them came stout packing cases, which made the Kafirs sweat by their weight, and being opened, yielded some small cross of marble, black-lettered with name and dates and sorrow-

ful texts; the lizards sunned themselves all day upon these monuments, for none disturbed them.

At the Sanatorium, day began in the cool of morning with a padding of bare feet in the long corridors and the fresh wakeful smell of coffee. Africa begins its day with coffee; it is the stirrup-cup of the country. Margaret opened her eyes to the brightness of morning and the brisk presence of Fat Mary, radiant across her adventurously held tray of coffee cups and reflecting the joy of the new light in her exulting smile. She had caught from Mrs. Jakes the first rule of polite conversation, though none of the subsequent ones, and she always began with a tribute of words to the weather.

"Sun burning plenty; how 's Missis?" was her usual opening gambit.

The wide-open windows flushed the room with air, sweet from the night's refreshment; and Margaret came to value that hour between the administration of coffee and the time for rising; it was the *bonne bouche* of the day. From her pillows she could lie and see the far mists making a last stand against the shock of the sun, breaking and diffusing before his attack and yielding up wider views of the rusty plain at each minute, till at last the dim blue of infinitely remote hills thickened the horizon. At the farm, a mile away, figures moved about and among the kraals, wonderfully and delicately clear in that diamond air which stirred her blood like wine. She could even make out Paul; the distance robbed him of nothing of his deliberate, dreamy character as he went to and fro with his air of one concerned with greater things than the mere immediacies of every day. There was always a suggestion about him of one who stoops from cloudy alti-

tudes of preoccupation to the little concerns of men, and towards Margaret he wore the manner of having a secret to divulge which was difficult to name. She met him sometimes on the veld paths between the two houses, and each time he seemed to draw near the critical moment of confession and fall back from it baffled. And though Margaret in her time had heard many confidences from many men and had made much progress in the subtle arts of the confidante, this was a case beyond her powers. The deftly sympathetic corkscrew failed to unbottle whatever moved in his mind; he evidently meant to bide his time. Meanwhile, seen from afar, he was a feature of the before-breakfast hour, part of the upholstery of the morning.

It was when she heard Mr. Samson pass her door on his way to the bath that she knew the house was definitely awake. He wore Turkish slippers that announced him as he went with the slap-slap of their heels upon the floor. Once, putting her head forth from the door incautiously to scout for Fat Mary she had beheld him, with his bath-robe girt about him by its tasseled cord and bath towels round his neck, going faithfully to the ritual initiation of his daily round, a figure consistent with the most correct gentlemanly tradition. The loose robe and the towels gave him girth and substance, and on the wary, intolerant old face, with its gay white mustache, was fixed a look of serious purpose. Mr. Samson never trifled with his toilet, by gad—what? Later, on his return, she would hear his debonair knock on Ford's door. "Out with you!" he would pipe—he never varied it. "Out with you! Bright and early, my boy—bright and early—what?" An answer growled from within contented

him, and he would turn in at his room, there to build up the completed personality which he offered daily to the world. It took time, too, and a meek Kafir valet, for a man is not made and perfected in a minute or two, and the result never failed to justify the labor. When next he appeared it would be as a member of the upper classes, armored and equipped, treading the stoep in a five-minutes' constitutional in a manner that at once dignified and lightened it. When one looked at him, one thought instinctively of exclusive clubs, of fine afternoons in Piccadilly, of the landed interest and the Church of England. One judged that his tailor loved him. He had a cock of the head, with a Homburg hat upon it, and a way of swelling his neck over the edge of his conservative collar, that were the very ensign of gallantry and spirit. It was only when he coughed that the power abandoned him, and it was shocking and pitiful to see the fine flower of gentility rattled like a dice-box in the throes of his malady and dropped at last against a wall, wheezing and gasping for breath in the image of a weak and stricken old man.

"Against the ropes," he would stammer shakily as he gathered himself together again, sniffling into his beautiful handkerchief. "Got me against the ropes, it did. Damn it—what?"

He suffered somewhat in his aggressive effect from the lack of victims. He had exhausted his black valet's capacity for being blasted by a glance, and had fallen back on Dr. Jakes. The wretched little doctor had to bear the brunt of his high severity when he came among his patients racked and quivering from his restless bed, and his bleared and tragic eyes appealed in vain

for mercy from that high priest of correct demeanor. Mr. Samson looked at him as a justice of the peace, detained upon the bench when he should be at lunch and conscious that his services to the State are gratuitous, might look upon a malefactor who has gone to the length of being without visible means of subsistence. The doctor might wriggle and smile painfully and seek the obscurity of corners, but it could not serve him; there was no getting out of range of that righteous and manly battery while he stayed in the same room with it. Once, however, he spiked its guns. The glare across the tea-table, the unspoken sheer weight of rebuke and condemnation, seemed to suddenly break up the poisoned fog that clouded his faculties, and he lifted his face, shining a little as with sweat, in a quick look at Mr. Samson. Margaret, who saw it, recognized it; just so he had looked in his study when he questioned her on her case and bent his mind to the consideration of it. It was direct, expert, impersonal, the dehumanized scrutiny of the man whose trade is with flesh and blood. Something had stirred the physician in the marrow of the man, and from a judge and an executioner of justice, a drawing-room hangman, Mr. Samson had become a case. At the beginning of it, Mrs. Jakes, unfailingly watchful, had opened her mouth to speak and save the situation, but she too saw in time and closed her mouth again. Mr. Samson glowered and the hectic in his thin cheeks burned brighter.

"You 've seen me before, Jakes!" he said, crisply.

The little doctor nodded almost easily. "Your hand, please," he said. "Thanks."

His forefinger found the pulse and dwelt on it; he waited with lips pursed, frowning.

"As I thought," he said, dropping the stringy white hand again. "Yes! I 'll see you in the study, Mr. Samson, please—in half an hour."

Mr. Samson gulped but stood up manfully. He was at his best, standing, by reason of a certain legginess which had been taken into account in the design of his clothes, but now those clothes seemed big for him.

"What is it?" he demanded, throwing his courage into his voice.

Dr. Jakes warned him with an uplifted finger.

"Sit down," he said. "Keep quiet. I 'll see you in half an hour."

He looked round at Margaret and the rest of them thoughtfully and went back to his place by the mantelpiece, sighing. It was his signal to them that his brief display of efficiency was over, and as though to screen his retreat, Mrs. Jakes coughed and hoped loudly that the rain would hold off.

But Mr. Samson made his way to a chair and sat down in it heavily, grasping its arms with his hands, and Margaret noticed for the first time that he was an old man.

Apparently the thing that threatened Mr. Samson was not very serious, or else the doctor had found means to head it off in time, for though he went from the study to his bed, he was at breakfast next morning, with a fastidious appetite and thereafter the course of his life remained unaltered.

Breakfast at the Sanatorium was in theory a meal that might be taken at any hour from eight till half past eleven. In the days of his dream, Dr. Jakes had seen dimly silver dishes with spirit lamps under them and a house-party effect of folk dropping in as they came down and helping themselves. But Mrs. Jakes' thou-

sand pounds had stopped short of the silver dishes and Mrs. Jakes herself could not be restrained from attending in person to see that the coffee was hot. Therefore, since it was not possible in any conscience to bind Mrs. Jakes to her post till noon, breakfast occurred between half-past eight and half-past nine.

The freshness, the exuberance, of the morning were not for her; already she wore the aspect of one who has done a stage of the day's journey and shed the bloom of her vigor upon it. The sunlight, waxing like a tide in flood, was powerless to lift her prim, black-dressed personality from the level of its cares and functions. She made to each as he entered the same mechanical little bow across the crockery, smiled the same formal smile from the lips outwards and uttered the same small comment on the blaze of day that filled the earth without the window. She had her life trimmed down to a routine for convenience of handling; she was one of those people—they are the salt of the earth!—whose passions are monosyllabic, whose woes are inarticulate. The three who sat daily at meat with her knew and told each other that her composure, her face keyed up like an instrument to its pitch of vacant propriety, were a mask. Sometimes, even, there had been sounds in the night to assure them of it; occasionally Jakes, on his way to bed in the small hours, would slip on the stairs and bump down a dozen or so of them, and lie where he fell till he was picked up and set on his way again; there would be the rasp of labored breath as he was supported along the corridor, and the mumble of his blurred speech hushed by prayerful whispers. A door slammed, a low cry bitten off short, and then silence in the big house, and in the morning

Mrs. Jakes with her coffee pot and trivial tinkle of speech and treble armor of practised bearing against the pity of those who knew! The sheer truculence of it held them dumb; it was the courage of a swashbuckler, of a bravo, and it imposed on them the decorum of silence.

The doctor, she gave them to understand, suffered from the climate.

"He never was strong," she would say, with her eyes fixed on the person addressed as though she would challenge him to dispute or question it. "Never! It 's the sun, I think; he suffers from his head, you know. He used to take aspirin for it when we were first married, but it does n't seem to do him any good now."

The three of them would nod sympathetically and look hastily elsewhere, as though ashamed to be the spectators of her humiliation.

Poor Mrs. Jakes! Seven thousand miles from the streets of Clapham Junction, an exile from the cheeriness and security of its little decent houses, she held yet with a frail hand to the skirts of its beatitude. In the drawer in her bedroom which also contained Jakes' dress suit, she kept in tissue paper and sincere regard a morocco-bound mausoleum of memory—an album. Only two or three times in Mr. Samson's experience—and he had been an inmate of the Sanatorium for four years—had she brought it forth. Once was on the night before young Shaw died, and when no soothing would hold him at peace in his bed, he had lain still to look through those yellowing portraits and hear Mrs. Jakes tell how this one was doing very well as a job-master and that one had turned Papist. But Margaret Hard-

ing had seen it. Mrs. Jakes had sat on her bed, quelling Fat Mary with her eye, and seen her unpack her clothes, the frocks new from dressmakers and tailors in London, the hats of only a month ago. Margaret had been aided in buying them by a philosophic aunt who had recently given up vegetarianism on the advice of her hairdresser. "My child, play light," had been the counsel of this relative. "Don't surprise the natives; they never like it. No frills; a vigorous vicarage style is what you want." And she had brought considerable powers of personality and vocabulary to bear on Margaret's choice, so that in the result there predominated a certain austerity of raiment which Margaret found unexciting. But Mrs. Jakes received them as canons of fashion, screwing up her mouth and nodding gravely as she mastered saliencies.

"I can't quite imagine them in these styles," she said; "the people in the Park, I mean. I suppose it 's this golf that 's done it."

In return for the exhibition, she had shown Margaret her album. It had many thick pages with beveled gilt edges, each framing from one to six portraits or groups, and she had led her hearer through the lot of them, from the first to the last. They sat side by side on the bed in Mrs. Jakes' room, and the album lay open on their laps, and Mrs. Jakes' finger traveled like a pointer among the pictures while she elucidated them in a voice of quiet pride. These pale and fading faces, fixed to the order of the photographer in more than human smiles, with sleek and decorative hair and a show of clothes so patently reserved for Sundays, were neither pale nor faded for her. She knew the life behind them, their passions and their strength, and spoke

of them as she might have spoken had they been waiting in the next room.

"That 's my sister," she said, her finger pausing. "Two years older than me, but she never married. And what she used to suffer from indigestion, words can't tell. And here 's my Aunt Martha—yes, she died seven years ago. My mother's sister, you know. My mother was a Penfold—one of the Penfolds of Putney. You 've heard of them? Ah, and here 's Bill Penfold, my cousin Bill. Poor Bill, he did n't do well, ever. He had a fancy for me, once, or so they said, but my father never could bear him. No harm, you know, no real harm, but larky—sort of. This one? Oh, that 's nobody—a Mr. Wrench, who used to collect for my father; he had a hair-lip. I did n't like him."

The thick page turned, and showed on the other side a single cabinet portrait of a thin woman, with her head a little on one side.

"My mother," said Mrs. Jakes, and shifted the album that Margaret might see better.

"She was a Penfold of Putney," she said, gently. "I think she shows it, you know. A bit quiet and refined, especially about the eyes. Don't you think so?"

It was the picture of the wife of a robust and hardy man, Margaret thought, and as for the eyes and their slight droop, the touch of listlessness which bespeaks an acquired habit of patience and self-suppression, she had only to look up and they returned her look from the face of Mrs. Jakes.

"And this?" she asked.

Mrs. Jakes smiled quite brightly; the photograph was one of a baby.

"That 's little Eustace," she answered, with no trace

of the softness of regret which had hushed her tone when she spoke of her mother. "My little baby; he 'd have been a big boy now. He was like his father—very like. Everybody noticed it. And that"—her finger passed on—"is George Penfold, Sergeant-Major in the Guards. His widow married again, a gunner in the Navy."

No sorrow for little Eustace. He, at any rate, would never see his dreams dislimn and fail him; no wife would watch the slow night through for his unsteady step nor read the dishonor written in his eyes. The first of the crosses in the barbed wire enclosure, Mrs. Jakes' empty and aching heart and her quick smile of triumph at his easy victory over all the snares of life —these and the faint, whitening photograph remained of little Eustace. Many a man leaves less when his time comes in South Africa.

"The weather is holding up nicely," she would say at breakfast. "Almost too fine, isn't it? But I suppose we ought n't complain."

It was a meal over which one lingered, for with the end of it there closed the eventful period of the day. While it lasted, the Sanatorium was at its best; one saw one's fellows in faint hues of glamour after the night's separation and heard them speak with a sense of receiving news. But the hour exhausted them of interest and one left the table, when all pretexts for remaining there had been expended, to face the emptiness of a morning already stale. That, in truth, was the price one paid for healing, the wearing, smothering monotony of the idle days, when there was nothing to do and one saw oneself a part of the stagnation that ruled the place. Mrs. Jakes withdrew herself to

become the motor of the domestic machinery, and till lunch time was not available for countenance and support. Ford occupied himself gravely with his little canvases, plastering upon them strange travesties of landscape, and was busy and intent and impatient of interruption for long periods at a time, while Mr. Samson, keeping a sufficient offing from all human contact, alternately strutted to and fro upon the stoep in a short quarter-deck promenade of ten steps and a right about turn, and lay in a deck chair with a writing case upon his knee and wrote fitfully and with deep thought long, important looking letters which never reached the post.

"You 're feeling the need of something to do," Ford told Margaret, when in desperation she came behind him and watched him modeling—as it seemed—in burnt sienna. "Why don't you knit—or something?"

"Knit?" said Margaret with huge scorn.

"You 'll come to it," he warned her. "There was a chap here before you came who taught himself the harp. A nuisance he was, too, but he said he 'd have been a gibbering idiot without it."

"That was n't saying much, perhaps," retorted Margaret.

"Oh, I don't know. He was a barrister of sorts, I believe. Not many barristers who can play the harp, you know."

"For goodness' sake, don't knead the stuff like that!" cried Margaret, watching his thumb at work. "You 're painting, not—not civil engineering! But what were you?"

"Eh?" He looked up at her.

"Before you had to come here, I mean? Oh, do talk for a minute," she begged.

"Sorry," he said. "I was in the army."

"And was it rather awful to have to give up and nurse yourself?"

"Well!" He glanced at her consideringly, as though to measure her intelligence. "It was rough," he admitted. "You see, the army 's not like barristering, for instance. It 's not a thing you can drop for a bit and then take up again; once you 're out, you 're out for good." He paused. "And I meant it," he added.

"Meant it?"

"Yes, there 's a chance nowadays for a chap with a turn for soldiering. There 's a lot to know, you see, and, well—I was by way of knowing it. That 's all."

He turned to his canvas again, but did not fall to work. Margaret saw his back, thin under his silk coat but flat and trim as a drilled man's should be.

"So for you, it meant the end of everything?" she suggested.

"Looks like it, does n't it!" he answered. "Still —we 'll see. They trained me and there 's just a chance, in the event of a row, that they might have a use for me. They 'd be short of officers who knew the game. You see—"

He hitched sideways on his camp-stool so that he might make himself clear to her.

"You see, the business of charging at the head of your men is a thing of the past, pretty nearly. All that gallery play is done away with. But take a hundred Tommies and walk 'em about for half a year,

dry-nurse 'em, keep them fed and healthy and moderately happy and as clean as you can, be something between an uncle and a schoolmaster to them, and have 'em ready at the end of it to march forty miles in a day and then fight—that 's an art in itself! In fact, it 's a trade, and it can't be learned in a week."

"I 'm perfectly sure it can't," agreed Margaret.

"Well, that was my trade," said Ford. "That's where I 'll come in when the band begins to play. See?"

He nodded at her expressively but with finality. It was plain that he considered the subject drained dry, and only waited for her to go to return to the mysteries of art.

"Oh, well," sighed Margaret, and left him to it.

Lunch lacked the character of breakfast. For one thing, it was impossible for three feeble people, debarred from exercise, to arrive at a state of appetite during a morning of semi-torpor, with a prospect before them of an afternoon of the same quality. For another, tempers had endured the heat and burden of four hours of enforced idleness and emerged from the test frayed at the edges.

This meant more labor for poor Mrs. Jakes, who could by no means allow the meal to be eaten in a bitter silence, and was driven by a stern sense of duty to keep up a dropping fire of small talk. Their sour faces, the grimness with which they passed the salt, filled her with nervous tremors, and she talked as a born hostess might talk to cover the confusion induced by an earthquake under the table, trembling but fluent to the last. There were times when her small, hesitating voice wrought Margaret up to the very point of

flat interventions. At one such moment, it was Ford who saved the situation.

"Miss Harding," he said, in a matter-of-fact way. "You are a pig!"

Mrs. Jakes gasped and bounded in her chair, and old Mr. Samson choked.

"And you," replied Margaret with intensity, "are just a plain beast!"

"That 's the idea," said Ford. "You feel better now?"

"Ever so much better, thank you," answered Margaret. "It was just what I wanted."

Mrs. Jakes was staring at them as though convinced that sudden mania had attacked them both at the same moment.

"It 's all right," Ford assured her. "It 's a dodge for blowing off temper. If you 'd just call Mr. Samson something really rude, he 'd be ever so grateful. Call him a Socialist, Mrs. Jakes."

"Oh, I could n't," said Mrs. Jakes, while Mr. Samson, mastering his emotions, glared and reddened. "You did alarm me," she said. "I thought for a moment—well, I don't know what I did think."

She was distinctly not at her ease for the remainder of the meal, and even at tea that afternoon, she kept an eye on the pair of them. To her mind, they were playing with edged tools.

It was at tea, as a rule, that Dr. Jakes was first visible, very tremulous and thirsty, but always submissive and content to be overlooked and forgotten. At dinner, later on, he would be better and able to talk with a jerky continuity to Margaret who sat at his right hand. He bore himself always with an air of

effort, like one who is not at home and whose acquaintance with his fellows is slight, and drank at table nothing but water. His eyes kept the Kafir servants under observation as they waited, and the black boys were full of alacrity in the consciousness that he was watching. "It 's strange," Mrs. Jakes used to say; "Eustace is so quiet, and yet the natives obey him wonderfully." Afterwards, in the drawing-room, he would flicker to and fro restlessly, growing each moment more irritable and incapable of hearing a sentence to the end. Half-way through the evening, he would seize an occasion to escape to his own quarters, and thereafter would be invisible till next day. Every one knew whither he went and for what purpose; eyes met in significant glances as the door closed softly behind him and Mrs. Jakes raised her voice in rapid speech to hide the sound of his tiptoe crossing of the hall; his secret was anybody's and even the Kafirs shared it, and yet the man had the force of mystery. He slid to and fro in the interstices of their lives and came to the surface only to serve and heal them. That done, he dropped back again to the solace that was his behind his locked door, while about him the house slept. He knew himself and yet could look his patients and his wife in the face. Mingled with their contempt and disgust, there was an acknowledgment of the quality of him, of a kind of wry and shabby greatness.

And thus the day came to its end. One by one, Margaret, Ford and Mr. Samson drew off and made their way to the dignified invitation of the big staircase and their rooms. Mrs. Jakes was always at hand to bid them good night, for her day was yet a long way from its finish.

"Tired, my dear?" she would ask Margaret. "It 's been a tiring day; I feel it myself. Good night to you."

In her room, Margaret would find Fat Mary waiting for her, sleepy in her vast, ridiculous way, but still prodigal of smiles, and ready to put her to bed with two left hands equipped with ten thumbs. She had a yawn which would have reminded Jonah of old times, but nothing could damp her helpful ardor, not even being discovered stretched fast asleep on Margaret's bed and being waked with the bath sponge. She made it clear that she would stop at few things to be of service.

"Missis not sleepy? Ah!" She stood in thought for five seconds. "Me nurse Missis, all same baby? Plenty strong—me!"

She dandled an imaginary child in her great arms, smiling cheerfully but quite in earnest. "Plenty strong," she assured the young lady from Kensington. "No? No? All a-right!"

Darkness at last, and the window wide to the small, whispering winds which people the veld at night! A sky of blue-black powdered with misty white stars, and from the distance, squeaks, small cries, the wary voice of the wilderness! Sometimes a jackal would range within earshot and lift up his voice under the stars to cry like a child, in the very accent of heartbroken, helpless woe. The nightly traffic of the veld was in full swing ere her eyes closed and its subdued clamor followed her into her dreams.

Silence in the big house and along the matted corridors—and one voice, speaking guardedly, in the hall. It never happened to Margaret to hear it and go to the stair-head and look down. Thence she might have

seen what would have made her less happy—Mrs. Jakes on her knees at the locked door of the study, with her candle set on the floor beside her, casting a monstrous shadow-caricature of her upon the gray stone wall. In her sober black dress she knelt on the mat and her small, kitchen-reddened hands tapped gently, carefully on the panels. She spoke through the keyhole and her fruitless whisperings rustled in light echoes about the high ceiling.

"Eustace, it 's me. Eustace! I 'm so tired, Eustace. Please open the door. Please, Eustace! It 's only me, dear."

CHAPTER V

"HARDLY smart," pronounced Mrs. du Preez, speaking low into Mrs. Jakes' ear. "Smart 's not the word I 'd use for her myself. *Distangay,* now, or *chic,* if you understand what that means!"

"Oh, quite!" replied Mrs. Jakes coldly.

They were seated side by side upon the sofa in the little parlor of the farm; its dimensions made it impossible for Mrs. Jakes to treat her hostess as distantly as she could have wished. There was nothing for it but to leave her ear and her unresponsive profile, composed to a steadfast woodenness, to the mercy of those critical and authoritative whispers until deliverance should offer itself. She settled her small black-gowned figure and coughed behind three gloved fingers.

Near the window looking forth across the kraals, Margaret Harding, the subject of Mrs. du Preez's comments, had the gaunt Boer for a companion. This was her visit of ceremony, her "return call"; two or three earlier visits, mere incidents of morning walks, when she had stopped to talk to Paul and been surprised and captured by Paul's mother, were understood not to count, and the Recording Angel would omit them from his notes. Mrs. du Preez had taken the initiative in due order by appearing at the Sanatorium one afternoon at tea-time; she had asked Dr. Jakes if he had "a mouth on him" and Margaret if there were many people in town. The next step in the transaction was for

Margaret to put on a real frock and a real hat, and take herself and her card-case through the white, scornful sunshine to the farm; and behold! by virtue of this solemnity, two women marooned at the heart of an ocean of sun-swamped desert had license to distinguish one another from common objects of the country side.

Even Mrs. Jakes, whose attitude towards Mrs. du Preez was one of disapproval tempered by dread, could see no alternative to this course. She shook her head at Margaret's amusement.

"This is not London, of course," she said reasonably. "I know that. But, my dear, we 're Christian people —even here."

At Margaret's side, the tall Boer, Christian du Preez, leaned against the wall and regarded her with shy, intent eyes that were oddly like Paul's. There was lacking in him that aloof and almost reverent quality of the boy which made him seem as though he regarded all things with an equal wonder and an equal kinship; he was altogether harder and more immediately forceful, a figure at home in his narrow world; but the relationship between him and his son was obvious. Margaret had only to glance across the room to where Paul sat by the door, following the trickle of conversation around the room from face to face with his eyes, to see the resemblance. What was common to them both was a certain shadowy reserve, a character of relationship to the dumbness and significance of the Karoo, and something else which had the gloom of melancholy and the power of pride. In each of them the Boer, the world's disinherited son, was salient.

Mrs. du Preez had secured his presence to grace the occasion after some resistance on his part, for he en-

tered the parlor seldom and was not at his ease there. Its atmosphere of indoor formality daunted and oppressed him, and he felt coarse and earth-stained under the eyes of the serene young men who watched him from their plush and fret-work frames. He had nothing to set against their sleek beauty and their calm sophistication but his fathom and odd inches of lean, slow-moving strength, his eyes of patient expectancy and the wild beard that redeemed his countenance from mildness. He had come under protest and for the sake of peace, and sat scowling in a chair, raw with shyness and irritation, in the dreadful interval between the completion of Mrs. du Preez's preparations and the arrival of the guests, while in face of him "yours blithely, Boy Bailey," set him a hopeless example of iron-clad complacency.

Then came Margaret and Mrs. Jakes, and at the first sign of them he was screened as in a cloud by the welcome of Mrs. du Preez. Their step upon the threshold was her cue for a cordiality of greeting that filled the room and overflowed into the passage in a rapid crescendo of compliment, inquiries as to health, laughter and mere bustle; it was like the entrance of two star performers supported by a full chorus and *corps de ballet.*

"So here you are, the two of you," was her style. "On time to a tick, too! Come right in, Miss Harding, and look out for that step—it 's a terror. A death-trap, *I* call it! And you, Mrs. Jakes. I won't say I 'm glad to see you, 'cause you 'll believe that without me telling you. You found it pretty hot walking, I know; we 're all pretty warm members in this community, are n't we? Sit down, sit down; no extra

charge for sitting down, y'know. And now, how *are* you? Sitting up and taking nourishment, eh? *That 's* the style!"

Margaret was aware, across her shoulder, of a gloomy male presence inhabiting the background.

"Let me introduce my husband," said Mrs. du Preez, following her glance. "Christian, this is Miss Harding. And now, Mrs. Jakes, let you an' me have a sit-down over here. You first—age before innocence, y'know. And how 's the poor old doctor?"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Jakes firmly, "he is quite well."

She smiled graciously at Paul, who was watching her, and took her seat, resigned to martyrdom.

Christian du Preez gave the girl a slack hand and murmured incoherently some salutation, while his gaze took in avidly each feature of her and summed up her effect of easy modernity. He recognized in her a certain feminine quality for which he had no name. Once before he had glimpsed it as in a revelation, when, as a youth newly returned from service on commando against rebellious Kafirs, he had spent an evening in a small town and there seen a performance by a traveling theatrical company. It was a crude and ill-devised show, full of improbable murders that affronted the common-sense of a man fresh from various killings; but in an interval between slaughters, there was a scene that brought upon the stage a slim girl who walked erect and smiled and shrugged easily at the audience. Her part was brief; she was not visible for more than a few minutes, and assuredly her shaft, so soon sped, struck no one else. It needed a Boer, with his feet in the mud and his head among the stars,

to clothe her with dignity as with a robe and add to her valuation of herself the riches of his woman-haunted imagination. She passed from sight again, and for the time he scarcely regretted her, for she left glamour behind her and a vision of womanhood equipped, debonnaire, heart-breaking in its fragility and its daring.

The outcome of that revelation was marriage within the week; but it never revisited the bored and weary woman whom Christian du Preez had brought home to his farm and its solitudes. It was as though he had tried to pick an image from still water; the fruit of that endeavor was memory and an empty hand. Even as he greeted Margaret he turned slowly and looked from her to his wife in unconscious comparison, and turned as unconsciously back again. Only Mrs. du Preez knew the meaning of that glance; she answered it with an obstinate compression of the mouth and went on talking to Mrs. Jakes about the hang of Margaret's skirt.

"It 's all right for her," she was saying. "These leggy ones can wear anything. But think how you 'd look in it, for instance. Why you 'd make a horse laugh!"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Jakes, unhappy but bristling. She never grew reconciled to Mrs. du Preez's habit of using her as a horrible example.

"You would that," Mrs. du Preez assured her. "You see, my dear, yours is an elderly style."

At the window, Margaret was doing what she could to thaw the tall Boer into talk, and meeting with some success. He liked, while possibly he did not quite understand, her relish for the view from the window,

with the rude circles of the kraals near at hand, the scattered huts of the farm Kafirs beyond them, and the all-subduing brown of the Karoo slipping forth to the edge of the sky. He had once heard a young man from the Sanatorium agree with Mrs. du Preez that the Karoo resembled a brick-field established in a cemetery. Margaret did better than that.

"I suppose you 've traveled all over it?" she asked him.

"When I was a young man, I rode transport," he answered. "Then I traveled; now I sit still in the middle of it and try to grow wool."

"Is it all like this?" she asked.

"Sometimes there is grass—a little—not much, and milk bushes and prickly pear," he told her. "But it is hard ground, all of it. It is very peaceful, though."

She nodded comprehendingly, and he found a stimulant in her quiet interest. He had not Paul's tense absorption in the harvest of the eye, but he would have been no Boer had the vacant miles not exercised a power over him.

"You 're never—discontented with it?" asked Margaret. "I mean, you find it enough for you, without wanting towns and all that?"

He shook his head, hesitating. "I do not know towns," he answered. "No, I don't want towns. But —every day the same sights, and the sun and the silence—"

"Yes?" she asked.

He was little used to confessing himself and his shyness was an obstacle to clear speech. Besides, the matter in his mind was not clear to himself; he was aware

of it as a color to his thoughts rather than as a fact to be stated.

"It makes you guess at things," he said at last. "You guess, but you don't ever know."

"What things?" asked Margaret.

"A lot of things," he answered. "God, and the devil, and all that. It 's always there, you see, and you *must* think."

A rattle in the passage and a start from Mrs. du Preez heralded tea, borne in upon a reverberating iron tray by a timid and clumsy Kafir maid, who set her burden insecurely upon the table and fled in panic. Christian du Preez ceased to speak as if upon a signal and Mrs. du Preez entered the arena hospitably.

"You 're sure you would n't rather have something else?" she asked Margaret, as she filled the cups. "There 's afternoons when a whisky-and-soda is more in my line than tea. Sure you won't? P'r'aps Mrs. Jakes will, then? We won't tell, will we, Paul? Well, 'ave it your own way, only don't blame me! Christian, reach this cup to Miss Harding."

The tall man did as he was bidden, ignoring Mrs. Jakes. In his world, women helped themselves. Paul carried her cup to Mrs. Jakes and sat down beside her in the place vacated by his mother. From there, he could see Margaret and look through the window as well.

"If you 'll have one, I 'll keep you company," suggested Mrs. du Preez privately to Mrs. Jakes.

"One what?" inquired Mrs. Jakes across her cup. The poor lady was feeling very grateful for the strong tea to console her nerves.

"One what!" Mrs. du Preez was scornful. "A drink, of course—a drink out of a glass!"

"No, thank you," replied Mrs. Jakes hastily. "I never touch stimulants."

"Oh, well!" Mrs. du Preez resigned herself to circumstances. "I suppose," she enquired, nodding towards Margaret, "*she* don't either?"

"I believe not," replied Mrs. Jakes.

Mrs. du Preez considered the matter. "You 'd think they 'd grow out of it," she observed enigmatically. "She seems to be lively enough, too, in her way. First person I ever saw who could make Christian talk."

Christian was talking at last. Margaret had paused to watch a string of natives pass in single-file, after the unsociable Kafir fashion, before the window, going towards the huts, with the sun-gilt dust rising about them in a faint haze. They were going home after their day's work, and she wondered suddenly to what secret joy of freedom they re-entered when the hours of the white man's dominion were over and the coming of night made a black world for the habitation of black men.

"I suppose there is no knowing what they really feel and think?" she suggested.

That is the South African view, the white man's surrender to the impregnable reserve of the black races; native opinion is only to be gathered when the native breaks bounds. Christian du Preez nodded.

"No," he agreed. "I have always been among them, and I have fought them, too; but what they think they don't tell."

"You have fought them? How was that?"

"When I was young. On commando," he explained,

with his eyes on her. It was luxury to see the animation of her pale, clear-cut face as she looked up and waited for him to go on.

"It was a real war," he answered her. "A real war. There was a chief—Kamis, they called him—down there in the south, and his men murdered an officer. So the government called out the burghers and sent Cape Mounted Rifles with us to go and punish him. I was twenty years old then, and I went too."

In the background Mrs. du Preez sniffed. "He 's telling her about that old Kafir war of his," she said. "He always tells that to young women. I know him!"

Christian went on, lapsing as he continued from the careful English he had spoken hitherto to the cruder vernacular of the Cape. He told of the marching and the quick, shattering attack against Kafirs at bay in the low hills bordering the Karoo, of a fight at night in a rain-squall, when the "pot-leg," the Kafir bullets hammered out of cold iron, sang in the air like flutes and made a wound when they struck that a man could put his fist into. His eyes shone with the fires of warm remembrance as he told of that advance over grass-grown slopes slippery with wet, when the gay desperadoes of the Cape Mounted Rifles went up singing, "Jinny, my own true loved one, Wait till the clouds roll by," and on their flank the burghers found cover and lit the night with the flashes of their musketry. It was an epic woven into the fiber of the narrator's soul, a thing lived poignantly, each moment of it flavored on the palate and the taste remembered. He had been in the final breathless rush that broke the Kafirs and sent them scuttling like rock-rabbits—"das-

sies," he called them—through the rocks to the kopje-ringed hollow where they would be held till morning.

And then that morning!

"Man, it was cold," he said. "There was no fires. We were lying in the bushes with our rifles under our bellies till coffee-time, and that Lascelles, our general, walked up and down behind us all the night. He was a little old soldier-officer from Capetown; his face was red and his mustache was white. The rain was falling on my back all the time, but sometimes I slept a little. And when it was sun-up, I could see down the krantz to the veld below, and there was all the Kafirs together, all in a bunch, in the middle of it. They did n't look much; I was surprised to see so few. They were standing and lying on the wet grass, and they seemed tired. Some were sleeping, even, stretched out like dead men below us, but what made me sorry for them was, they were so few.

"I *was* sorry," he added, thoughtfully.

Margaret nodded.

"But it was a real war," he assured her quickly. "When the sun was well up, we moved, and presently all the burghers were lying close together with our rifles ready. It was Lascelles that ordered it. I did n't understand, then, for I knew a beaten Kafir when I saw one, and those below were beaten to the ground. By and by the Cape Mounted Rifles went past behind us, and dipped down into a hollow on our right; we had only to wait, and it was very cold. I was wondering when they would let us make coffee and talking to the next man about it, when from our right, so sudden that I jumped up at the sound of it, the Cape Mounted Rifles

fired at the Kafirs down below. Man, that was awful! It was like a thunder on a clear day. All of us were surprised, and some called out and swore and said Lascelles was a fool. But it was queer, all the same, to see the Kafirs. Twenty of them was killed, and one of them had a bullet in his stomach and rolled about making screams like laughing. The rest—they didn't move; they didn't run; they didn't cry out. A few looked up at us; I tell you, it was near enough to see their white eyes; but the others just stopped as they were. They was like cattle, like sick cattle, patient and weak and finished; the Cape Mounted Rifles could have killed them all and they wouldn't have lifted their hands.

"Our commandant—Van Zyl, he was called, a very fat man—clicked with his tongue. 'Wasting them,' he said. 'Wasting them!'

"Then we went down the hill and came all round them, standing among the dead bodies, and Lascelles with his interpreter and his two young officers in tight belts went forward to look for Kamis, the chief. The interpreter—he was a yellow-faced Hollander—called out once, and in the middle of the Kafirs there stood up an old Kafir with a blanket on his shoulders and his wool all gray. He came walking through the others with a little black boy, three or four years old, holding by his hand and making big round eyes at us. It was the son that was left to him; the others, we found out, were all killed. He was an old man and walked bent and held the blanket round him with one hand. He looked to me like a good old woman who ought to have been sitting in a chair in a kitchen.

" 'Are you Kamis?' they asked him.

"'I am Kamis,' he said, 'and this is my son who is also Kamis.'

"He showed them the little plump piccanin, who hung back and struggled. One of the young officers with tight belts put an eye-glass in his eye and laughed. Lascelles did not laugh. He was a little man, as neat as a lady, with ugly, narrow eyes.

"'Tell him he 's to be hanged,' he ordered.

"Old Kamis heard it without a sign, only nodding as the interpreter translated it to him.

"'And what will they do to my son?' he asked.

"Lascelles snuffled in his nose angrily. 'The Government will take care of his son,' he said, and turned away. But when he had gone a few steps he turned back again. 'Tell the old chap,' he ordered, 'and tell him plainly, that his son will be taken care of. He 'll be all right, he 'll be well looked after. Savvy?' he shouted to Kamis. 'Piccanin all right; plenty *skoff*, plenty *mahli*, plenty everything.'

"The Hollander told the old chief while Lascelles waited, and the men of the Cape Mounted Rifles who had the handcuffs for him stood on each side. Kamis heard it with his head on one side, as if he was a bit deaf. Then he nodded and put out his hands for the irons.

"Lascelles held out his hands to the baby Kafir.

"'Come with me, kid!' he said.

"The baby hung back. He was scared. Old Kamis said something to him and pushed him with his knee, and at last the child went and took Lascelles' hand.

"'That 's it,' said Lascelles, and lifted him up. As he carried him away, I heard him talking to the young

officer with the eye-glass. 'That 's a damned silly grin you 've got, Whitburn,' he said, 'and you may as well know I 'm sick of it.'

"I think he was a bit ashamed of carrying the baby. He had n't any of his own. I saw his wife later, when we were disbanded—a skinny, yellow woman who played cards every evening.

"And then, at Fereira, they hanged old Kamis, while we all stood round with our rifles resting on the ground. There was a man to hang him who wore a mask, and I was sorry about the mask, because I thought I might meet him sometime and not know him and be friends with him. He had red hair though; his mask could n't hide that, and there is something about red hair that turns me cold. There were about fifty of his tribe who were brought there to see the end of Kamis and take warning by him, and when he came out of the jail door, between two men, with his hands tied behind him, they all lifted a hand above their heads to salute him. The men on each side of him held him by the elbows and hurried him along. They took him so fast that he tripped his foot and nearly fell. 'Slower, you swine!' said Lascelles, who was there with a sword on. He walked across and spoke to Kamis. 'Piccanin all right!' he said, 'All-a right!' said Kamis, and then they led him up the steps. They were all about him there, the jail men and the man with the mask; for a minute I could n't see him at all. Then they were away from him, and there was a bag on his head and the rope was round his neck. The man with the mask seemed to be waiting, and at last Lascelles lifted his hand in a tired way and there was a crash of falling planks and a cry from the Kafirs, and old Kamis, as straight and lean

as a young man, was hanging under the platform just above the ground and swinging a little."

Christian du Preez frowned and looked at Margaret absently.

"And then I was sick," he said reflectively. "*Quite* sick!"

"I don't wonder," said Margaret. "But the baby! What happened to the Kafir baby?"

"I did n't see the baby any more," replied the Boer. "But I read in a newspaper that they sent it to England. Perhaps it died."

"But why send it to England?" asked Margaret. "What could it do there?"

Christian du Preez shrugged one shoulder. "The Government sent it," he replied, conclusively. No Boer attempts to explain a government; it is his eternal unaccountable. "You see it was the Chief, that baby was, so they wanted to send it a long way off, perhaps."

"And now, I suppose it 's a man," said Margaret; "a poor negro all alone in London, who has forgotten his own tongue. He wears shabby clothes and makes friends with servant girls, and never remembers how he held his father's hand while you burghers and the soldiers came down the hillside. Don't you think that 's sad?"

"Yes," said the Boer thoughtfully, but without alacrity, for after all a Kafir is a Kafir and his place in the sympathies of his betters is a small one. "Kafirs look ugly in clothes," he added after a moment.

At the other side of the room, the others had ceased their talk to listen. Mrs. du Preez laughed a little harshly.

"They 're worse in boots," she volunteered. "Ever

seen a nigger with boots on, Miss Harding? He walks as if his feet weighed a ton. Make a clatter like clog-dancin'. But round here, of course, there 's no boots for them to get."

"There 's one now," said Margaret. "Look—he 's passing the kraals. He 's got boots on."

They all looked with a quick curiosity that was a little strange to see; one would have thought a passing Kafir would scarcely have interested them by any eccentricity of attire. Even Mrs. Jakes rose from her place on the sofa and stood on tip-toe to see over Mrs. du Preez's shoulders. There is an instinct in the South African which makes him conscious, in his dim, short-sighted way, that over against him there looms the passive, irreconcilable power of the black races. He is like a man carrying a lantern, with the shifting circle of light about him, and at its frontier the darkness pregnant with presences.

The Boer, learned in Kafir varieties, stared under puckered brows at the single figure passing below the kraals. He marked not so much any unusual feature in it as the absence of things that were usual.

"Paul," he said, "go an' see what he 's after."

Paul was already at the door, going out silently. He paused to nod.

"I 'm going now," he said.

"Strange Kafirs want lookin' after," explained Mrs. du Preez to Margaret as the boy passed the window outside. "You never know what they 're up to. Hang out your wash when they 're around and you 're short of linen before you know where you are, and there 's a nigger on the trek somewhere in a frilled petticoat or a table-cloth. They don't care what it is; anything 'll

do for them. Why, last year one of 'em sneaked a skirt off Mrs. Jakes here. Did n't he, now?"

"It was a very good skirt," said Mrs. Jakes, flushing. "A very good one—not even turned."

"Well, he was in luck, then," said Mrs. du Preez. "And what he looks like in it—well, I give it up! Miss Harding, you ain't going yet, surely?"

"I 'm afraid *I* must," put in Mrs. Jakes, seizing her opportunity. "I have to see about dinner."

They shook hands all round. "You must all come up to tea with me some afternoon soon," suggested Margaret. "You will come, won't you?"

"Will a duck swim?" inquired Mrs. du Preez, genially. "You just try us, Miss Harding. And oh! if you want to say good-by to Paul, I know where he 's gone. He 'll be down under the dam, makin' mud pies."

"Not really?"

"You just step down and see; it won't take you a moment. He makes things, y'know; he made a sort of statue of me once. 'If that 's like me,' I told him, 'it 's lucky I 'm off the stage.' And what d 'you think he had the cheek to answer me? 'Mother,' he says, 'when you forget what you look like, you look like this.' "

"I think I will just say good-by to Paul," said Margaret, glancing at Mrs. Jakes.

"Come on after me, then," answered the doctor's wife. "I really must fly."

"Pigs might fly," suggested Mrs. du Preez, enigmatically.

The Boer did not go to the door with them; he waited where he stood while Mrs. du Preez, her voice waxing through the leave-takings to a shrill climax of farewell, accompanied them to her borders. When she returned

to the little room, he was still standing in his place, returning "Boy Bailey's" glazed stare with gloomy intensity.

His wife looked curiously at him as she moved to the table and began to put the scattered tea-cups together on the tray.

"She 's a nice girl, Christian," she said, as she gathered them up.

He did not answer, though he heard. She went on with her work till the tray was ready to be carried forth, glancing at his brooding face under her eyebrows.

"Christian," she said suddenly. "I remember when you told *me* about the war and the Kafir baby."

He gave her an absent look. "You said, 'Hang the Kafir baby!' " he answered.

He turned from her, with a last resentful glare at the plump perfection of Boy Bailey, and slouched heavily from the room. Mrs. du Preez, with a pursed mouth, watched him go in silence.

Mrs. Jakes was resolute in her homeward intentions; she had a presentiment of trouble in the kitchen which turned out to be well grounded. So Margaret went alone along the narrow rut of a path which ran down towards the shining water of the dam, which the slanting sun transmuted to a bath of gold. She was glad of the open air again, after Mrs. du Preez's carefully guarded breathing-mixture with its faint odor of furniture polish and horsehair. Paul, by the way, knew that elusive fragrance as the breath of polite life; it belonged to the parlor, where his father might not smoke, and to nowhere else, and its usual effect was to rarefy human intercourse to the point of inanity. In the parlor, one spoke in low tones and dared not clear one's

throat and felt like an abortion and a monstrosity. Years afterwards, when the doors of the world had been forced and it had turned out to be a smallish place, only passably upholstered, it needed but a sniff of that odor to make his hands suddenly vast and unwieldy and reduce him to silence and discomfort.

The path skirted the dam, at the edge of which grew rank grass, and dipped to turn the corner of the sloping wall of earth and stones at its deeper end. As she went, she stooped to pick up a fragment of sun-dried clay that caught her eye; it had been part of a face, and on it the mouth still curved. It was rudely done, but it was there, and it had, even the broken fragment that lacked the interpretation of its context, some touch of free vigor that arrested her in the act of letting it drop. She went on carrying it in her hand, and at the corner of the wall stopped again at the sound of voices. Some one was talking only twenty paces away, hidden from her by the bulk of the wall.

"You must shape it in the lump," she heard. "You must go for the mass. That 's everything—the mass! Do you see what I mean?"

She knew the tones, the clear modulations of the pundit-speech which belonged to her class, but there was another quality in the voice that was only vaguely familiar to her, which she could not identify. It brought to her mind, by some unconscious association, the lumbering gaiety of Fat Mary.

"Ye-es," very slowly. That was Paul's voice answering. "Yes. Like you see it in the distance."

"That 's it," the baffling voice spoke again. "That 's it exactly. And work the clay like this, without breaking it, smoothly."

She still held the broken fragment in her hand as she stepped round the corner of the wall to look. Paul, sitting cross-legged on the ground, had his back to her, and facing him, with a lump of red clay between his hands, which moved upon it deliberately, molding it with care, sat a Kafir. He was intent upon his work, and the brim of his hat, overhanging his eyes, prevented him from seeing her arrival. She stood for a moment watching; the two of them made a still group to which all the western sky and the wide land were a background. And then the clay fragment dropped from her hand, hit on a stone underfoot and cracked into pieces that dissolved the dumb curve of the mouth in ruin.

At the little noise it made, Paul turned sharply and the Kafir raised his head and looked at her. There was an instant of puzzled staring and then the Kafir lifted his hat to her.

"I 'll be going," he said, and began to rise to his feet.

"Don't," said Paul. "Don't go." He was looking at the girl expectantly, waiting for her to justify herself. Now was the time to confirm his faith in her. "Don't go," he repeated. "It 's Miss Harding that I told you about." He hesitated a moment, and now his eyes appealed to her. "She 's from London," he said; "she 'll understand."

The Kafir waited, standing up, a slender, upright young man in worn discolored clothes. To Margaret then, as to Paul in his first encounter with him at the station, there was a shock in the pitiful, gross negro face that went with the pleasant, cultivated voice. It added something slavish to his travel-stained appearance that touched the girl's quick pity.

She stepped forward impulsively.

"Please don't go," she begged, "I should be so sorry. And Paul will introduce us."

He smiled. "It shall be as you like, of course," he answered. "Will you sit down? The grass is always dry here."

He made an oddly conventional gesture, as though the slope of the dam wall were a chair and he were going to place it for her.

"Oh, thanks," said Margaret, and sat down.

CHAPTER VI

THE Kafir seated himself again in his old place and let his hand fall upon the mass of clay which he had been fashioning for Paul's instruction. He was the least perturbed of the three of them. He sank his finger-tops in the soft plasticity of the stuff, and smiled across it at the others, at the boy, embarrassed and not sure of Margaret yet, and at her, still mastered by her curiosity. It was almost as if he were used to being regarded with astonishment, and his self-possession had a touch of that deliberate lime-lit quality which distinguishes the private lives of preachers and actors and hunchbacks.

For the rest, he seemed to be about Margaret's age, clean run and of the middle stature. Watching him, Margaret was at a loss to discover what it was about him that seemed so oddly commonplace and familiar till she noted his clothes. They were "tweeds." Though he had apparently slept on the bare ground in them and made them a buffer between his skin and many emergencies of travel, they were still tweeds, such as any sprightly youth of Bayswater might affect for a week-end in the country.

It needed only a complexion and an attitude to render him inconspicuous on a golf-course, but in that place, under the majestic sun, with the heat-dazzle of the Karoo at his back, his very clothes made him the more incomprehensible.

Margaret realized that he was waiting for her to speak.

"You model, then?" she asked, striving to speak in an altogether matter-of-fact tone, as though to come across gifted, English-speaking negroes, giving art lessons in odd corners, were nothing unusual.

"Just a little," he answered. "Enough to help Paul to make a beginning. Eh, Paul?"

Paul nodded, turning to Margaret. "He knows lots," he said. "*He 's* been in London, too. It was there he learned to—to model."

Paul had a way of uttering the word "London" which conveyed to Margaret's ready sympathies some little part of what it meant to him, the bright unattainable home of wonderful activities, the land of heart's desire.

"In London?" She turned to the Kafir, "London seems a long way from here, does n't it?"

"Yes; a long way." He was not smiling now. "It is seven months since I left London," he said; "and already it seems dim and unreal. It 's as if I 'd dreamed about it and only remembered parts of my dream."

Paul was listening with that profound attention he seemed to give to all things.

"I don't feel it 's as far as all that," said Margaret. "But then, I was there two months ago. Probably that makes a difference."

She was only now beginning to realize the strangeness of the encounter, and as she talked her faculties, taken by ambush and startled from their functions, regained their alertness. She watched him composedly as he replied.

"Yes," he said. "And there are other differences, too. Since I left London I have not slept under a roof."

While he spoke he did not cease to finger the clay; as he turned it here and there, Margaret was able to see it was the head of a negro that he was shaping and the work was already well forward. It was, indeed, the same head whose unexpected scowl had astonished Paul; and as he moved it about, the still gloomy face of clay seemed to glance backward and forward as though it heard him and doubted.

"But why not?" demanded Margaret.

He seemed to hesitate before answering, and meanwhile his hands were busy and deft.

"Why not?" she repeated. "Seven months! I don't understand. Why haven't you slept under a roof all that time?"

"Well!" He smiled as he spoke at last. "You see —I don't speak Kafir. That 's where the trouble is. When first I came up here, I went across to the southern districts, where Kafirs are pretty numerous. My idea was to live among them, in order to—well, to carry out an idea of mine."

He paused. "They didn't know what to make of you?" suggested Margaret.

"No—unless it was a corpse," he answered. "I don't really blame them; they must have been horribly suspicious of me. At the first kraal I came to—the first village, that is—I tried to make myself known to a splendid old chap, sitting over a little fire, who seemed to be in charge. That was awfully queer. Every man, woman and child in the place stood round and stared and made noises of distrust—that 's what they sounded

like; and the old chap just squatted in the middle and blinked up at me without a word. I 'd heard that most of the Kafirs about here could understand a little English, so I just talked away and tried to look innocent and useful and I hoped I was making the right impression. The chap listened profoundly till I had quite done, looking as though he were taking in every word of it. Then he lifted both arms, with exactly the movement of a cock when it 's going to crow, and two young fellows behind him leaned down and took hold of them and helped him very slowly to his feet. I made sure I 'd done the trick and that he was getting up to shake hands or something. But instead of that he groped about with his right hand in a blind, helpless kind of way, till one of his private secretaries put a knobherry, a bludgeon with a knob on the end, into it. And then, the poor old thing who had to be helped to his feet took one quick step in my direction and landed me a bang on the head with the club. I just remember that all the others burst into screams of laughter; I must have heard them as I went down."

"What a horrible thing!" exclaimed Margaret.

He smiled again, his teeth flashing brilliantly in his black face.

"It was awkward at the time," he admitted. "I came to later on the veld where they dragged me, with a lump on my head the size of my fist. And sore—by Jove! I was sore. Still, it 's just possible I might have gone back for another try, if the first thing I saw had n't been a tall black gentleman sitting at the entrance to the kraal with an assegai—a spear, that is—ready for me. I concluded it was n't good enough!"

"No!" Margaret agreed with him. "I should think not. But why should they receive you like that?"

"Perhaps," he suggested, "they learned it from the white men!"

("He means to look ironical," Margaret thought. "It is n't a leer; it 's irony handicapped by a negro face. Poor thing!")

"Then you had a bad time somewhere else?" she asked aloud. "Would you mind telling how? If you would, please don't tell me. But I 'd like to hear."

"Then you shall. Of course you shall." The look that tried to be ironical vanished. "If you could only know how grateful I am for—for this—for just your politeness. For you being what you are—"

"Please," interrupted Margaret. "Please don't. I want to hear. Just tell me."

There was something pathetic in his prompt obedience. He shifted ground at once like a child that is snubbed.

"It was in Capetown," he said; "when I landed from the boat. There was trouble on the boat, too; it was full of South Africans, and I had to have my meals alone and only use the deck at certain hours. I could n't even put my name down for a sovereign in the subscription they raised for the ship's band; the others would n't have it. I only got rid of that sovereign on the last evening, when the leader of the band came to me as I walked up and down on the boat deck. He passed me once or twice before he stopped to speak to me—making sure that nobody was looking. 'Hurry up!' he said, in a whisper. 'Where 's the quid you was going to subscribe?' 'Say Sir!' I said—for the fun of the thing. He could n't manage it for fully a minute; his share

of it was n't more than half-a-crown. I went on walking and left him where I stood, but as I came back again he was ready for me. 'No offense, sir,' he said, quite clearly. I gave him the money and passed on. But he was still there when I turned again, and ever so anxious to put himself right with his conscience. 'D' you know what I 'd do with you niggers if I had my way?' he began, still in a large hoarse whisper, like air escaping from a pipe. 'I 'd 'ave you back into slavery, I would. I 'd sell the lot of you.' I laughed. 'You could n't buy many of us with that sovereign!' I told him. Really, I rather liked that man."

"There are men like that," said Margaret thoughtfully. "And women, too."

"Yes, are n't there?" he agreed quickly. "But I 'd rather—it 's a pity you should know it. However, you wanted to hear about Capetown."

The afternoon was waning; the Kafir, with his hat at the back of his head and the rim of its brim framing his patient face, was set against a skyful of melting color. Even in face of those two attentive hearers, he sat as though in an immense and significant isolation, imposing himself upon them by virtue of his strong aloofness. Margaret was conscious of a great gulf set between them, an unbridgable hiatus of spirit and purpose. The man saw the life of the world not from above or below but as through a barred window, from a room in which he was prisoned and solitary.

He was entirely matter-of-fact as he told of his troubles and difficulties when he landed in Capetown; he spoke of them as things accepted, calling for no comment. On the steamer from England he had been told of the then recent experiences of a concert party of Amer-

ican negroes who visited Africa and had been obliged to sleep in the streets, but the tale had the sound of a smoking-room ingenuity and had not daunted him. But it was true for all that and he ran full-tilt into the application of it, when nightfall of the day of his arrival found him still seeking vainly for a lodging. He had money in plenty, but neither money nor fair words availed to bribe an innkeeper into granting him a bed.

"But I saw a lot of Capetown," he said. "I walked that afternoon and evening full twenty miles—once all the way out to Sea Point and back again. And I was perhaps a little discouraged: there were so many difficulties I had n't expected. I knew quite well before I left England that I should have difficulties with the whites, but I had n't allowed for practically the same difficulties with the blacks. There was a place behind the railway station, a tumble-down house in which about a dozen Kafirs were living, and I tried that. They fetched a policeman who ordered me away, and I had to go. You see, they could n't make head or tail of me; I was much too unusual for them to keep company with. So about midnight I found myself walking down towards the jetty at the foot of Adderly Street. You don't know Capetown, I suppose? The jetty sticks out into the bay; it 's no great use except for a few boats to land and at night it serves the purpose of the Thames Embankment for men who have nowhere else to go. I was very tired by then. As I passed the Van Riebeck statue, a woman spoke to me."

He hesitated, examining Margaret's listening face, doubtfully.

"I understand," she said. "Go on. A white woman, was it?"

"Yes, a white woman," he replied with the first touch of bitterness she had seen in him. "A poor devil who had fallen so far that she had lost even the scruples of her trade. I heard her coughing in the shadow when she was some distance from me, and saw her come out into the lamplight still breathless, with the shadows making a ruin of her poor painted face. But she had herself in hand; she was game. At the moment I was near enough, she smiled—I suppose the last thing they forget is how to smile. 'Koos!' she called to me, softly. 'Koos!' 'Koos' is the Taal for cousin, you know; it 's a sort of familiar address. I could n't pass her without a word, so I stopped. 'You ought to see to that cough,' I told her. She was horribly surprised, of course, and I rather think she started to bolt, but her cough stopped her. It was a bad case, that—a very bad case, and of course she was n't sufficiently clad or nourished. I advised her to get home to bed, and she leaned against the wall wiping her eyes with the corner of her handkerchief wrapped round her finger so as not to smudge the paint, and stared at me with a sort of surrender. I got her to believe at last that I was what I said—a doctor—"

"*Are* you a doctor?" interrupted Margaret.

"Yes," he answered. "I hold the London M.B.; oh, I knew what I was talking about. When she understood it, she changed at once. She was pretty near the end of her tether, and now she had a chance, her first chance, to claim some one's pity. The lives they lead, those poor smirched things! She had a landlady; can you imagine that landlady? And unless she brought money with her, she could not even go back to her lodgings. She told me all about it, coughing in between, under the windows of a huge shopful of delicate

women's wear, with a big arc-light spluttering above the empty street and Van Riebeck looking over our heads to Table Mountain. Was n't it strange—us two homeless people, cast out by our own folk and rejected by the other color?"

"Yes," answered the girl; "very strange and sad."

"It was like a dream," said the Kafir. "It was weird. But I like the idea that she accosted a possible customer and found a deliverer. I gave her the money she needed, of course, and listened to her lungs and wrote her a prescription on the back of a card she produced. No real use, you know—just something to go on with. She was past any real help. No use going into details, but it was a bad case!"

He shook his head thoughtfully, in a mood of gloom.

"And then?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, then she went away," he said, "and I watched her go. She crossed the road, holding up her skirt clear of the mud; she was a neat, appealing little figure in spite of everything. She passed with her head drooped to the corner opposite and there she turned and waved her hand to me, I waved back and she went into the shadows. She 's in the Valley of the Shadows now, though; she had n't far to go.

"But you can't conceive how still and wonderful it was on the jetty, with the water all round and the moon making a broad track of beams across it, and over the bay the bulk of inland hills massive and inscrutable. It was like looking at Africa from a great distance; and yet, you know, I was born here!"

His hands had fallen idle on the clay, but as he ceased to speak he began to work again, with eyes cast down to his task. The light was already failing, and as the three

of them waited in the silence that followed on his words, there reached them the dull pulse of the gourd-drum at the farm, stealing upon their consciousness gradually. Paul frowned as he recognized it, coming out of the trance of his faculties unwillingly. He had sat motionless with parted lips through the Kafir's story, so still in his absorption that the others had forgotten his presence.

"That 's for me," he said, slowly, but took his time about getting up. He was looking at the Kafir with the solemn, sincere eyes of a child.

"I would like," he said, "to make a clay of that woman."

"Eh!" The Kafir suppressed his smile. "Time enough, Paul. Plenty of time and plenty of clay for you to do that—and plenty of women, too."

Paul was on his feet by now, looking down at the other two.

"But," he hesitated, "I *must* make it," he said. "I must."

The Kafir nodded. "All right," he said. "You make it, Paul, and show it to me. As you see her, you know; that 's how you must do it."

"Yes," said Paul seriously. "Brave and smiling and dying. I know!"

The gourd-drum throbbed insistently. He moved towards it reluctantly. "Good night," he said.

"Good night, Paul!"

A moment later he was vague in the growing dusk, and they heard his long whistle of answer to the drum.

Margaret, with her chin propped on her hand, sat on the slope of the wall. The Kafir began to put away the clay on which he had been working. Paul's store

was an abandoned ant-bear's hole across which there trailed the broad dry leaves of a tenacious gourd. He put the unfinished head carefully in this receptacle, and then drew from it another object, which he held out to the girl.

"A bit of Paul's work," he explained.

She took it in her hand, but for the time being her interest in the immaturities of art gave place to the strange realities in whose presence she felt herself to be. She glanced at it perfunctorily, a little sketch of a woman carrying a basket, well observed and sympathetic.

"Yes," she answered. "He has a real gift. But just now I can't think about that. I 'm thinking about you."

"I 've saddened you," he said. "I did n't want to do that. I should have held my tongue. But if you could know what it means to talk to you at all, you 'd forgive me. I 'm not regretting, you know; I 'm going through it of my own free will; but it 's a lonely business. I 'm always glad of a tramp making his way along the railway line, and Paul was a godsend. But you! Oh, you 'll never understand how splendid it is to tell you anything and have you listen to it."

He spoke almost humbly, but with a warmth of sincerity that moved her.

"You 'll have to tell me more," she said. "You 'll be coming here again?"

"Indeed I will," he replied quickly. "I 'll be here often, if only in the hope that you 'll come down to the dam sometimes. But—there 's one thing."

"Yes?" asked Margaret.

"You know, it won't do for you to be seen with me," he said gently. "It won't do at all."

Margaret laughed. "I think I can bear up against

the ill-report of the neighborhood," she said. "My kingdom is not of this particular world. We won't bother about that, please."

The Kafir shook his head. "There 's no help for it," he answered. "I must bother about it. It bothers me so much that unless you will let me know best in this (for I really do know) I 'll never come this way again. Do you think I could bear it, if people talked about you for suffering the company of a nigger? You don't know this country. It 's a dangerous place for people who go against its prejudices. So if I am to see you, for God's sake be careful. I 'll look forward to it like —like a sick man looking forward to health; but not if you are to pay for it. Not at that price."

"Oh, well!" Margaret found the topic unpleasant. "I don't see any risk. But you 're rather putting me into the position of the bandmaster on the ship, are n't you? I 'm to have the sovereign; that is, I 'm to hear what I want to hear; but only when nobody 's looking. However, it shall be as you say."

"Thank you." He managed to sound genuinely grateful. "You 're awfully kind to me. You shall hear everything you want to hear. Paul can always lay hands on me for you."

Margaret rose to her feet. The evening struck chill upon her and she coughed. In the growing dark, the Kafir knit his brows at the sound of it.

"I must be going now," she said. "Paul did n't introduce me after all, did he? But I don't think it 's necessary."

She stood a little above him on the slope of the wall, a tall, slight figure seen against its dark bulk.

"I know your name," he answered.

"And I know yours," she put in quickly. "Tell me if I 'm not right. You 're Kamis. I 've heard about you this afternoon."

He stared at her for a space of seconds. "Yes," he said slowly. "I 'm Kamis. But—who told you?"

She laughed quietly. "You see," she said, "I 've got something to tell, too. Oh, I know lots about you; you 'll have to come and hear that, at any rate."

She put out her hand to him.

"Good night, Mr. Kamis," she said.

The Kafir bared his head before he took her hand. He seemed to have some difficulty in speaking.

"Good night," he said. "Good night! I 'll never forget your goodness."

He let her go and she turned back to the path that should take her past the farmhouse and the kraals to the Sanatorium and dinner. At the turn of the wall, its lights met her with their dazed, unwinking stare, shining from the dining-room which had no part in the spacious night of the Karoo and those whose place is in the darkness. She had gone a hundred yards before she looked back.

Behind her the western sky treasured still the last luminous dregs of day, that leaked from it like water one holds in cupped hands. In the middle of it, high upon the dam wall, a single human figure, swart and motionless, stood to watch her out of sight.

CHAPTER VII

"LOOKS pooty bad for the huntin'," remarked Mr. Samson suddenly, glancing up from the crinkly sheets of the letter he was reading. "Here 's a feller writin' to me that the ground 's like iron already. You hunt, Miss Harding?"

"Oh, dear, yes," replied Margaret cheerfully. "Lions and elephants and—er—eagles. Such sport, you know!"

"Hah!" Mr. Samson shook his head at her indulgently. "Your grandmother would n't have said that, young lady. But you youngsters, you don't know what 's good for you—by gad! Eagles, eh?"

Once in a week, breakfast at the Sanatorium gained a vivid and even a breathless quality from the fact that one found the weekly letters piled between one's knife and fork, as though Mrs. Jakes knew—no doubt she did—that her guests would make the chief part of their meal on the contents of the envelopes. The Kafir runner who brought them from the station arrived in the early dawn and nobody saw him but Mrs. Jakes; she was the human link between the abstractions of the post-office and those who had the right to open the letters and be changed for the day by their contents. It was not invariably that the mail included letters for her, and these too would be put in order on the breakfast table, under the tap of the urn, and not opened till the others were down. Then Mrs. Jakes also, like a

well-connected Jack Horner, could pull from the eloquence of her correspondents an occasional plum of information to pass round the table.

"Only think!" she would offer. "The Duchess of York has got another baby. Let me see now! How many does that make?"

It was always Mr. Samson who was down first on mail-mornings, and his was always the largest budget. His seat was at the end of the table nearest the window, and he would read sitting a little sideways in his chair, with the letter held well up to the light and his right eyebrow clenched on a monocle. Fat letters of many sheets, long letters on thin foreign paper, newspapers, circulars—they made up enough to keep him reading the whole morning, and thoughtful most of the afternoon. From this feast he would scatter crumbs of fashionable or sporting intelligence, and always he would have something to say about the state of the weather in England when the post left, three weeks before.

"Just think!" he continued. "Frost already—and fogs! Frost, Miss Harding; instead of this sultry old dust-heap. How does that strike you? Eh?"

"It leaves me cold," returned Margaret agreeably.

"Cold!" he retorted, snorting. "Well, I 'd give something to shiver again, something handsome. What 's that you 're saying, Ford?"

Ford had passed a post-card to Mrs. Jakes to read and now received it back from her.

"It 's Van Zyl," he replied. "He writes that he 'll be coming past this afternoon, about tea time, and he 'll look in. I was telling Mrs. Jakes."

"Good!" said Mr. Samson.

"It 's a man I know," Ford explained to Margaret.

"He looks me up occasionally. He 's in the Cape Mounted Police and a Dutchman. You 'll be in for tea?"

"When somebody 's coming? Of course I will," said Margaret. "A policeman, is he?"

"Yes," answered Ford. "He 's a sub-inspector, an officer; but he was a trooper three years ago, and he 's quite a chap to know. You see what you think of him."

"I 'll look at him carefully," said Margaret. "But tell me some more, please! Is he a mute, inglorious Sherlock Holmes, or what?"

Ford laughed. "No," he said. "No, it 's not that sort of thing, at all. It 's just that he 's a noticeable person, don't you know? He 's the kind of chap who 's simply born to put into a uniform and astride of a horse; you 'll see what I mean when he comes."

Mrs. Jakes leaned to the right to catch Margaret's eye round the urn.

"My dear," she said seriously. "Mr. Van Zyl is the image of a perfect gentleman."

"All right!" said Margaret. "Between you, you 've filled me with the darkest forebodings. But so long as it 's a biped, and without feathers, I 'll do my best."

Her own letters were three in number. One was from an uncle who was also her solicitor and trustee, the source of checks and worldly counsel. His letter opened playfully; the legal uncle, writing in the inner chamber of his offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, hoped that she did not find the local fashions in dress irksome, and made reference to three mosquitos and a smile. The break of a paragraph brought him to business matters and the epistle concluded with an allusion to the effect of a Liberal Government on markets.

It was, thought Margaret, a compact revelation of the whole mind of the legal uncle, and wondered why she should get vaguely impatient with his implied suggestion that she was in an uncivilized country. The next was from the strong-minded aunt who had imposed austerity upon her choice of clothes for her travels—a Chinese cracker of a letter, detonating along three sheets in crisp misstatements that had the outward form of epigrams. The aunt related, tersely, her endeavor to cultivate a physique with Indian clubs and the consequent accident to her maid. "But arms like pipe-stems can be trusted to break like pipe-stems," she concluded hardily. "I 've given her cash and a character, and the new one is fat. No pipe-stems about her, though she bruises with the least touch!"

These two she read at the breakfast table, drinking from her coffee-cup between the bottom of one sheet and the top of the next, savoring them for a vintage gone flat and perished. It came to her that their writers lived as in dim glass cases, seeing the world beyond their own small scope as a distance of shadows, indeterminate and void, while trivialities and toys that were close to them bulked like impending doom. She laid down the legal uncle in the middle of a sentence to hear of Van Zyl and did not look back to pick up the context when she resumed her reading. The legal uncle, in her theory, had no context; he ranked as a printer's error. It was the third letter which she carried forth when she left the table, to read again on the stoep.

The jargon of the art schools saves its practitioners much trouble in accounting for those matters and things which come under their observation, since a phrase is

frequently indistinguishable from a fact and very filling at the price. But Margaret was not ready with a name for that quality in the third letter which caused her to read it through again and linger out its substance. It was from a girl who had been her school-fellow and later her friend, and later still a gracious and rarely-seen acquaintance, smiling a welcome at chance meetings and ever remoter and more abstracted from those affairs which occupied Margaret's days. The name of a Kensington square stood at the head of her letter as her address; Margaret knew it familiarly, from the grime on the iron railings which held its melancholy garden a prisoner, to the deep areas of its houses that gave one in passing glimpses of spacious kitchens under the roots of the dwellings. Three floors up from the pavement, Amy Hollyer, in her brown-papered room, with the Rossetti prints on the wall and the Heleu etching above the mantel, had set her mild and earnest mind on paper for Margaret's reading, news, comment, small jest and smaller dogma, a gentle trickle of gossip about things and people who were already vague in the past. It was little, it was trivial, but through it there ran, like the red thread in a ripping-cord, a vein of zest, of sheer gusto in the movement and thrill of things. It suggested an ant lost in a two-inch high forest of lawn-grass, but it rendered, too, some of the ant's passionate sense of adventure.

"She 's alive," thought Margaret, laying the letter at last in her lap. "Dear old Amy, what a wonderful world she lives in! But then, she 'd furnish any world with complications."

Twenty feet way, Ford had his little easel between his outstretched legs and was frowning absorbedly from

it to the Karoo and back again. Twenty feet away on her other side, Mr. Samson was crackling a three-weeks-old copy of *The Morning Post* into readable dimensions. Before her, across the railing of the stoep, the Karoo lifted its blind face to the gathering might of the sun.

"Even this," continued Margaret. "She 'd find this inexhaustible. She was born with an appetite for life. I seem to have lost mine."

From the great front door emerged to the daylight the solid rotundity of Fat Mary, billowing forth on flat bare feet and carrying in her hand a bunch of the long crimson plumes of the aloe, that spiky free-lance of the veld which flaunts its red cockade above the abomination of desolation. Fat Mary spied Margaret and came padding towards her, her smile lighting up her vast black face with the effect of "some great illumination surprising a festal night."

"For Missis," she remarked, offering the crimson bunch.

Margaret sat up in her chair with an exclamation. "Flowers!" she said. "Are they flowers? They 're more like great thick feathers. Where did you get them, Mary?"

Fat Mary giggled awkwardly. "A Kafir bring 'um," she explained. "He say—for Missis Harding, an' give me a ticky (a threepenny piece). Fool—that Kafir!"

Margaret stared, holding the fat, fleshy crimson things in her hands.

"Oh!" she said, understanding. "Where is he, Mary? The Kafir, I mean?"

Fat Mary shook her head placidly. "Gone," she

said; and waved a great hand to the utter distance of the heat haze. "That Kafir gone, Missis. He come before breakfus'; Missis in bed. Say for Missis Harding an' give me ticky. Fool! Talk English—an' boots!"

She shrugged mightily to express the distrust and contempt she could not put into words.

"Boots!" she repeated darkly.

"Well," said Margaret, "they 're very pretty, anyhow."

Fat Mary wrinkled her nose. "Stink," she observed. "Missis smell 'em. Stink like a hell! Missis throw 'um away."

Margaret looked at the stout woman and smiled. Fat Mary's hostility to the Kafir and the aloe plumes and the ticky was plainly the fruit of jealousy.

"I won't throw them away yet," she said. "I want to look at them first. But did you know the Kafir, Mary?"

"Me!" Fat Mary drew herself up. "No, Missis—not know that *skellum*. Never see him before. What for that Kafir come here, an' bring stink-flowers to my Missis? An' boots? Fool, that Kafir! *Fool!*"

"All right, Mary," said Margaret, conciliatingly. "Very likely he won't come again. So never mind this time."

Fat Mary smiled ruefully. Most of her emotions found expressions in smiles.

"That Kafir come again," she said thoughtfully, "I punch 'im!"

And comforted by this resolve, she retired along the stone stoep and betook herself once more to her functions indoors.

At his post further along the stoep, Ford was looking up with a smile, for the sounds of Fat Mary's grievance had reached him. Margaret did not notice his attention; she was turning over the great bouquet of cold flaunting flowers which had come to her out of the wilderness, as though to remind her that at the heart of it there was a voice crying.

Ford's friend was punctual to his promise to arrive for tea. Upon the stroke of half-past four he reined in his big horse at the foot of the steps and swung stiffly from the saddle. He came, indeed, with circumstances of pomp, armed men riding before him and captives padding in the dust between them. Old Mr. Samson sighted him while he was yet afar off and cried the news and the others came to look.

"Who 's he got with him?" demanded Mr. Samson, fumbling his papers into the pockets of his writing case. "Looks like a bally army. Can you see what it is, Ford?"

Ford was staring with narrowed eyes through the sunshine.

"Yes," he said slowly. "He 's got prisoners. But what 's he bringing them here for?"

"Prisoners? Oh, do let me look!"

Margaret came to his side and followed his pointing finger with her eyes. A blot of haze was moving very slowly towards them over the surface of the ground, and through it as she watched there broke here and there the shapes of men and horses traveling in that cloud of dust.

"Why, they 're miles away," she exclaimed. "They 'll be hours yet."

"Say half-an-hour," suggested Ford, his face still

puckered with the effort to see. "They 're moving briskly, you know. He 's shoving them along."

"But why prisoners?" enquired Margaret. "What prisoners could he get on the Karoo? There 's nobody to arrest."

"Van Zyl seems to have found somebody, anyhow," answered Ford. "I had a glimpse of people on foot. But I can't imagine why he brings 'em here."

"Ask him," suggested Mr. Samson. "What 's your hurry? Wait till he comes and then ask him."

First Mrs. Jakes and then the doctor joined the spectators on the stoep as the party drew out of the distance and defined itself as a string of Kafirs on foot, herded upon their way by five Cape Mounted Police with a tall young officer riding in the rear. It was a monstrous phenomenon to emerge thus from the vagueness and mystery of the haze, and Margaret uttered a sharp exclamation of distress as it came close and showed itself in all its miserable detail. There were perhaps twenty Kafirs, men and women both, dusty, lean creatures with the eyes, at once timorous and untameable, of wild animals. They shuffled along dejectedly, their feet lifting the dust in spurts and wreaths, their backs bent to the labor of the journey. Three or four of the men were handcuffed together, and these made the van of the unhappy body, but save for these fetters, there was nothing to distinguish one from another. Their separate individualities seemed merged in a single slavishness, and as they turned their heads to look at the white people elevated on the stoep, they showed only a row of white hopeless eyes. Beside them as they plodded, the tall beautiful horses had a look of nonchalance and superior-

ity, and the mounted men, bored and thirsty, looked over their heads as perfunctorily as drovers keeping watch on docile cattle.

"How horrible!" said Margaret, in a low voice, for the officer, followed by an orderly, was at the foot of the steps.

The prisoners and their guards did not halt; they continued their way past the house and on towards the opposite horizon. Their backs, as they departed, showed gray with clinging dust.

Sub-Inspector Van Zyl, booted and spurred, trim in his dust-smirched blue uniform, with his holster at his hip and the sling across his tight chest, lifted his hand in the abrupt motions of a salute as he received Mrs. Jakes' greeting.

"Kind of you," he said, with a sort of curt cordiality and the least touch in life of the thick Dutch accent. "Most kind! Tea 's the very thing I 'd like. Thank you."

At sight of Margaret, grave and young, as different from Mrs. Jakes as if she had been of another sex, a slight spark lit in his eye for a moment and there was an even stronger abruptness of formality in his salute. His curiously direct gaze rested upon her several times during the administration of tea in the drawing-room, where he sat upright in his chair, with knees apart, as though he were still astride of a horse. He was a man made as by design for the wearing of official cloth. His blunt, neatly-modeled Dutch face, blond as straw where it was not tanned to the hue of the earth of the Karoo, had the stolid, responsible cast that is the ensign of military authority. His uniform stood on him like a skin; and his mere unconsciousness of the

spurs on his boots and the revolver on his hip strengthened his effect of a man habituated to the panoply and accoutrement of war. Even his manners, precise and ordered like a military exercise, never slackened into humanity; the Dutch Sub-Inspector of Cape Mounted Police might have been a Prussian Lieutenant with the eyes of the world on him.

"Timed myself to get here for tea," he explained to Ford. "Just managed it, though. Hot work traveling, to-day."

Hotter, thought Margaret, for those of his traveling companions who had no horses under them, and who would not arrive anywhere in time for tea.

"You seem to have made a bag," replied Ford. "What 's been the trouble?"

"Fighting and looting," answered Sub-Inspector Van Zyl carelessly. "A row between two kraals, you know, and a man killed."

"Any resistance?" enquired Ford.

"A bit," said Van Zyl. "My sergeant got his head split open with an axe. Those niggers in the south are an ugly lot and they 'll always fight. You see, it 's only about twenty years ago they were at war with us; it 'll need another twenty to knock the fighting tradition out of 'em."

"They looked meek enough as they passed," remarked Ford. "There did n't seem to be a kick left among them."

Van Zyl nodded over the brim of his tea-cup. "There is n't," he said shortly. "They 've had the kick taken out of 'em."

He drank imperturbably, and Margaret had a momentary blurred vision of defeated, captured Kafirs in

the process of having the kick extracted from them and the serene, fair-haired sub-inspector superintending its removal with unruffled, professional calm.

"Been here long, Miss Harding?"

Van Zyl addressed her suddenly across the room.

"Not quite long enough to understand," she replied. "Did you say those poor creatures were fighting —among themselves?"

"Yes."

"But why?" she persisted. "What did they fight for?"

He shrugged his neat shoulders. "Why does a Kafir do anything?" he enquired. "They told a cock-and-bull story that seems to be getting fashionable among them of late, about a son of one of their old chiefs appearing among them dressed like a white man. He went from kraal to kraal, talking English and giving money, and at one kraal the headman, an old chap who used to be a native constable of ours, actually seems to have laid his stick across some wandering nigger who could n't explain what he wanted. The next kraal heard of this, and decided at once that a chief had been insulted, and the next thing was a fight and the old headman with an assegai through him. But if you want my opinion, Miss Harding—it does n't make such a good story, but I 've had to do with niggers all my life—"

"Yes?" said Margaret. "Tell me."

"Well," said Van Zyl, "my opinion is that if the old headman had n't been the owner of twelve head of cattle, all ready to be stolen, he might have gone on whacking stray Kafirs all his life without hurting anybody's feelings."

"Except theirs," suggested Mr. Samson. "Hah, ha! Except the chaps that he whacked—what?"

"Quite so!" Sub-Inspector Van Zyl smiled politely. "He was a vigorous old gentleman, and rather given to laying about him with anything that came handy. Probably picked up the habit in the police; the Kafir constables are always pretty rough with people of their own color. Anyhow, he 's done for; they drove a stabbing assegai clean through him and pinned him to a post of his own hut. I think I 've got the nigger that did it."

Mrs. Jakes at the tea-table shook her skirts applaudingly. At any rate, the rustle of them as she shook came in like applause at the tail of the sub-inspector's narrative.

"He ought to be hanged," she said.

"He will be," said the sub-inspector. "But we 're not at the bottom of it yet. There *is* a fellow, so far as I can find out, coming and going on the Karoo, dressed in clothes and talking a sort of English. He 's the man I want."

"What for?" demanded Margaret, and knew that she had spoken too sharply. Van Zyl seemed to remark it, too, for his eye dwelt on her inquiringly for a couple of seconds before he replied.

"It 'll probably be sedition," he replied. "The whole lot of 'em are uneasy down in the south there and we 're strengthening our posts. No!" he said, to Mrs. Jakes' exclamation; "there 's no danger. Not the slightest danger. But if we could just lay hands on that wandering nigger who talks English—"

He left the sentence unfinished, and his nod signified that dire experiences awaited the elusive Kafir

when he should come into the strong hands of authority. The Cape Mounted Police, he replied, would cure him of his eccentricities.

He passed on to talk with Ford and Mrs. Jakes about common acquaintances, officers in the police and the Rifles and people who lived in Dopfontein, sixty miles away, and belonged to a tennis club. Then the sound of the softly-closing door advertised them of the tiptoe departure of Dr. Jakes, and soon afterwards Van Zyl rose and announced that he must leave to overtake his party.

"If you can come to Dopfontein, Miss Harding," he said, as he took his leave, "hope you 'll let me know. Decent little place; we 'll try to amuse you."

The orderly, refreshed but dusty still, came quickly to attention as the sub-inspector appeared in the doorway, and his pert cockney face took on the blankness proper to discipline. At a window above, Fat Mary shed admiring glances upon him, and a certain rigor of demeanor might have been taken to indicate that the warrior was not unconscious of them. He looked back over his shoulder as he cantered off in the wake of the sub-inspector.

"What 's the trouble?" asked Ford, discreetly, as the sun-warmed dust fluffed up and enveloped the riders in a soft cloud of bronze.

Margaret turned impatiently from looking after them.

"I hate cruelty," she said, irritably.

Ford looked at her shrewdly. "Of course you do," he said. "But Van Zyl 's not cruel. What he said is true; he 's been among Kafirs all his life."

"And learned nothing," retorted Margaret. "It 's

beastly; it 's just beastly. He can't even think they ever mean well; they only fight to steal, according to him. And then he 'takes the kick out of them!' Some day he 'll work himself up to crucify one of them."

"Hold on," said Ford. "You must n't get excited; you know, Jakes does n't allow it. And you 're really not quite just to Van Zyl."

"Is n't he proud of it?" asked Margaret scornfully.

"I wonder," said Ford. "But it 's just as likely he 's proud of policing a smallpox district single-handed and playing priest and nurse when he was only paid to be jailer and executioner. He got his promotion for that."

"Mr. Van Zyl did that?" asked Margaret incredulously. "Did he arrange to have the deaths over in time for tea?"

Ford laughed shortly. "You must ask him," he replied. "He 'll probably say he did. He 's very fond of tea. But at any rate, he sees as much downright hard fighting in a year as a man in the army might see in a lifetime and—" he looked at Margaret out of the corners of his eyes—"the Kafirs swear by him."

"The Kafirs do?" asked Margaret incredulously.

"They swear by him," Ford assured her. "You try Fat Mary some time; she 'll tell you."

"Oh, well," said Margaret; "I don't know. Things are beastly, anyhow, and I don't know which is worse—cruelty to Kafirs or the Kafirs' apparent enjoyment of it. That man has made me miserable."

Ford frowned. "Don't be miserable," he said, awkwardly. "I hate to think you 're unhappy. You

know," he went on, more fluently as an argument opened out ahead of him, "you 've no business really to concern yourself with such things. You don't belong among them. You 're a bird of passage, just perching for a moment on your way through, and you must n't eat the local worms. It 's poaching."

"There 's nothing else to eat," replied Margaret lugubriously.

"You should have brought your knitting," said Ford. "You really should! Capital thing for staying the pangs of hunger, knitting!"

"Thank you," said Margaret. "You 're very good. But I prefer worms. Not so cloying, you know!"

She did not, however, act upon Ford's suggestion to ask Fat Mary about the sub-inspector. Even as rats are said to afford the means of travel to the bacillus of bubonic plague, it is probable that the worms of a country furnish vehicles for native prejudices and habits of mind. At any rate, when Margaret surveyed Fat Mary, ballooning about the room and creased with gaiety, there came to her that sense of the impropriety of discussing a white man with her handmaid which is at the root of South African etiquette.

"Them flowers gone," announced Fat Mary tranquilly, when Margaret was in bed and she was preparing to depart.

"Gone! .Where?" asked Margaret.

"I throw 'um away," was the contented answer. "Stink—pah! So I throw 'um. Goo' night, missis."

CHAPTER VIII

"DON'T you some times feel," asked Margaret, "as though dullness had gone as far as it possibly can go, and something surprising simply must happen soon?"

Ford glanced cautiously about him before he answered.

"Lots of things might happen any minute to some of us," he said. "You haven't been ill enough to know, but we aren't all keen for surprises."

It was evening, and the big lamp that hung from the ceiling in the middle of the drawing-room breathed a faint fragrance of paraffin upon the inhabitants of the Sanatorium assembled beneath it. From the piano which stood against the wall, Mrs. Jakes had removed its usual load of photographs and ornamental pottery, and now, with her back to her fellow creatures, was playing the intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana." Her small hands moving upon the keys showed the red knuckles and uneven nails which had come to her since first she learned that composition within earshot of the diapason of trains passing by Clapham Junction, mightily challenging her laborious tinkle-tinkle, and with as little avail as now the night of the Karoo challenged it. Like her gloves and her company manners, it stood between her shrinking spirit and those poignant realities which might otherwise have overthrown her. So when she came to the end of it she

turned back the pages of the score which was propped before her, and without glancing at the notes, played it through again.

"For instance," whispered Ford, under cover of the music; "look at Jakes. He carries a catastrophe about with him, don't you think?"

The doctor was ranging uneasily to and fro on the hearth-rug, where the years of his exile were recorded in patches worn bare by his feet. There was already a change to be remarked in him since Margaret had first made his acquaintance; some of his softness and appealing guiltiness was gone and he was a little more desperate and unresponsive. She had mentioned this once to Ford, who had frowned and replied, "Yes, he 's showing the strain." She looked at him now covertly. He was walking to and fro before the empty fireplace with quick, unequal steps and the fingers of one hand fidgeted about his mouth. His eyes, flickering back and forth, showed an almost frantic impatience; poor Mrs. Jakes' melodious noises that smoothed balm upon her soul were evidently making havoc with his nerves. He seemed to have forgotten, in the stress of his misery, that others were present to see him and enter his disordered demeanor upon their lists of his shortcomings. As he faced towards her, Margaret saw the sideward sag of his mouth under his meager, fair mustache and the panic of his white eyeball upturned. His decent black clothes only accentuated the strangeness of him.

"He looks dreadful," she said; "dreadful. Ought n't you to go to him—or something?"

"No use." Ford shook his head. "*I* know. But I wish he 'd go to his study, all the same. If he stays here he may break down."

"Why does n't he go?" asked Margaret.

"He can't make up his mind. He 's at that stage when to decide to do anything is an effort. And yet the chap 's suffering for the only thing that will give his nerves relief. Can't help pitying him, in spite of everything, when you see him like that."

"Pitying him—yes," agreed Margaret. Mrs. Jakes with her foot on the soft pedal, was beginning the intermezzo again for the fifth time and slurring it dreamily to accord with her brief mood of contentment and peace.

"You know," Margaret went on, "it 's awfully queer, really, that I should be in the same room with a man in that condition. Three months ago, I could n't have borne it. Except sometimes on the streets, I don't think I 'd ever seen a drunken man. I must have changed since then in some way."

"Learned something, perhaps," suggested Ford. "But you were saying you found things dull. Well, it just struck me that you 'd only got to lift up your eyes to see the makings of a drama, and while you 're looking on, your lungs are getting better. Are n't you a bit hard to satisfy?"

"Am I? I wonder." They were seated at opposite ends of a couch which faced them to the room, and the books which they had abandoned—loose-backed, much-handled novels from the doctor's inelastic stock of literature—lay face down between them. Margaret looked across them at Ford with a smile; he had always a reasonable answer to her complainings.

"You don't take enough stock in human nature," he said seriously. "Too fastidious—that 's what you are, and it makes you miss a lot."

"Perhaps you 're right," she answered. "I 've been thinking something of the kind myself. A letter I had —from a girl at home—put it in my mind. She writes me six sheets all about the most trivial and futile things you can imagine, but she speaks of them with bated breath, as it were. If only she were here instead of me, she 'd be simply thrilled. I wish you knew her."

"I wish I did," he said. "I 've always had an idea that the good Samaritan was a prying, inquisitive kind of chap, and that 's really what made him cross the road to the other fellow. He wanted to know what was up, in the first place, and the rest followed."

"Whereas—" prompted Margaret. "Go on. What 's the moral?"

Ford laughed. "The moral is that there 's plenty to see if you only look for it," he answered.

"I 've seen one thing, at any rate, without looking for it, since I 've been here," retorted Margaret. "Something you don't know anything about, Mr. Ford."

"What was that?" he demanded. "Nothing about Jakes, was it?"

"No; nothing about him."

She hesitated. She had it in her mind to speak to him about the Kafir, Kamis, and share with him that mystery in return for the explanations which he could doubtless give of its less comprehensible features. But at that moment Mrs. Jakes ceased playing and began to put the score away.

"I 'll tell you another time," she promised, and picked up her book again.

The cessation of the music seemed to release Dr.

Jakes from the spell which had been holding him. He stopped walking to and fro and strove to master himself for the necessary moment before his departure. He turned a writhen, twitching face on his wife.

"You played it again and again," he said, with a sort of dull resentment.

Mrs. Jakes looked up at him swiftly, with fear in her eyes.

"Don't you like it, Eustace?" she asked.

He only stared without answering, and she went on speaking hurriedly to cover him.

"It always seems to me such a sweet piece," she said. "So haunting. Don't you think so, Miss Harding? I 've always liked it. I remember there was a tea-room in Oxford Street where they used to have a band in the afternoons—just fiddles and a piano—and they used to play it there. Many 's the time I 've dropped in for a cup of tea when I was shopping—not for the tea but just to sit and listen. Their tea was n't good, for the matter of that, but lots of people went, all the same. Tyler's, was the name, I remember now. Do you know Tyler's, Miss Harding?"

She was making it easy for the doctor to get away, after his custom, but either the enterprise of making a move was too difficult for him or else an unusual perversity possessed him. At any rate, he did not go. He stood listening with an owlish intentness to her nervous babble.

"I know Tyler's very well," answered Margaret, coming to her aid. "Jolly useful place it is, too. But I don't remember the band."

"*I* used to go to the Queen's Hall," put in Dr.

Jakes hoarsely. "Monday afternoons, when I could get away. And afterwards, have dinner in Soho."

From the window, where Mr. Samson lay in an armchair in apparent torpor, came a wheeze, and the single word, "Simpson's."

Margaret laughed. "How sumptuous," she said. "Now, Mr. Ford, you tell us where you used to go."

"Club," answered Ford, promptly. "I had to have something for my subscription, you know, so I went there and read the papers."

Mrs. Jakes was watching her husband anxiously, while Ford and Margaret took up the burden of inconsequent talk and made a screen of trivialities for her. But to-night Dr. Jakes needed expression as much as whisky; there was the hopeless, ineffectual anger of a baited animal in his stare as he faced them.

"Why aren't any of you looking at me?" he said suddenly.

None answered; only Mr. Samson sat up on his creaking armchair of basketwork with an amazed, "Eh? What 's that?" Margaret stared helplessly and Mrs. Jakes, white-faced and tense, murmured imploringly, "Eustace."

"Dodging with your eyes and babbling about teashops," said the doctor hotly. "You think, because a man 's a bit—"

"Eustace," cried Mrs. Jakes, clasping her hands. "Eustace *dear.*"

It was wonderful to notice how her habit of tone held good in that peril which whitened her face and made her tremble from head to foot as she stood. From her voice alone, one would have implied no more than some playful extravagance on the doctor's part; she still

hoped that it could be carried off on the plane of small affairs.

"You would go out without a proper hat on, Jakes," said Ford suddenly. "Feel stuffy in the head, don't you?"

"What do you mean—stuffy?" demanded Jakes.

But already the vigor that had spurred him to a demonstration was exhausted and the need for alcohol, the burning physical famine for nerve-reinforcement, had him in its grip.

"Stuffy?" repeated Ford, watching him closely. "Oh, you know what I mean. I 've seen chaps like it heaps of times after a day in the sun; they get the queerest fancies. You really ought to get a proper hat, though."

Mrs. Jakes took him by the arm persuasively. "Don't you think you 'd better lie down for a bit, Eustace—in the study?"

"In the study?" He blinked twice or thrice painfully, and made an endeavor to smile. "Yes, perhaps. This—er—stuffy feeling, you know—yes."

His wife's arm steered him to the door, and once out of the room he dropped it and fairly bolted across the echoing hall to his refuge. In the drawing-room they heard his eager feet and the slam of the door that shut him in to his miserable deliverance from pain, and the double snap of the key that locked out the world and its censorious eyes.

"You—you just managed it," said Margaret to Ford. The queer inconsequent business had left her rather breathless. "But was n't it horrible?"

"Some day we shan't be able to talk him down, and then it 'll be worse," answered Ford soberly. "That 'll

be the end for Mrs. Jakes' home. But you played up all right, you know. You did the decent thing, and in just the right way. And I was glad, because, you know, I 've never been quite sure how you 'd shape."

"You thought I 'd scream for help, I suppose," suggested Margaret.

"No," he replied slowly. "But I often wondered whether, when the time came, you 'd go to your room or stay and lend a hand. Not that you would n't be quite right to stand out, for it 's a foul business, all this, and there 's nothing pretty in it. Still, taking sides is a sign of life in one's body—and I 'm glad."

"That 's all right, then," said Margaret. "And it 's enough about me for the present, too. You said that some day it won't be possible any more to talk him down. Did you mean—some day *soon?*"

"Goodness knows," said Ford. He leaned back and turned his head to look over the back of the couch at Mr. Samson. "Samson," he called.

"Yes; what?"

"That was bad, eh! What 's the meaning of it?"

Mr. Samson blew out his breath windily and uncrossed his thin legs. "Don't care to go into it before Miss Harding," he said pointedly.

"Oh, bother," exclaimed Margaret. "Don't you think I want to know too?"

"Well, then," said Mr. Samson, with careful deliberation, "since you ask me, I 'd say it was a touch of the horrors casting its shadow before. He does n't exactly see things, y' know, but that 's what 's coming. Next thing he knows, he 'll see snakes or cuttlefish or rats all round the room and he 'll—he 'll gibber. Sorry, Miss Harding, but you wanted to know."

"But—but—" Margaret stared aghast at the feeble, urbane old man asprawl in the wicker chair, who spoke with genial authority on these matters of shadowy horror. "But how can you possibly know all this?"

Mr. Samson smiled. He considered it fitting and rather endearing that a young woman should be ignorant of such things and easily shocked when they were revealed.

"Seen it all before, my dear young lady," he assured her. "It 's natural you should be surprised, but it 's not so uncommon as you think. Why, I remember, once, in '87, a feller gettin' out of a cab because he said there was a bally great python there—a feller I knew; a member of Parliament."

Margaret looked at Ford, who nodded.

"He knows all right," he said, quietly. "But I don't think you need be nervous. When it comes to that, we 'll have to do something."

"I 'm not nervous—not in that way, at least," said Margaret. "Only—must it come to that? Is n't there anything that can be done?"

"If we got a doctor here, the chances are he 'd report the matter to the authorities," said Ford. "This place is licensed or certified or something, and that would be the end of it. And then, even if there was n't that, it is n't easy to put the matter to Mrs. Jakes."

"I—I suppose not," agreed Margaret thoughtfully. "Still, if you decided it was necessary—you and Mr. Samson—I 'd be willing to help as far as I could. I would n't like to see Mrs. Jakes suffer for lack of anything I could do."

"That 's good of you," answered Ford. "I mean—

good of you, really. We won't leave you out of it when the time comes, because we shall need you."

"Always knew Miss Harding was a sportsman," came unexpectedly from Mr. Samson in the rear. And then the handle of the door, which was loose and arbitrary in its workings, rattled warningly and Mrs. Jakes reappeared.

She made a compunctious mouth, and expressed with headshakes a sense that all was not well, though perfectly natural and proper, with the doctor. Her eyes seemed rather to dwell on Margaret as she gave her bulletin.

"Mr. Ford was perfectly right about the hat," she said. "Perfectly right. He ought to have one of those white ones with a pugaree. He never was really strong, you know, and the sun goes to his head at once. But what can I do? He simply won't listen to me when I tell him we ought to go Home. The number of times I 've said to him, 'Eustace, give it up; it 's killing you, Eustace,'—you would n't believe. But he 's lying down now, and I think he 'll be better presently."

Mr. Samson spoke again from the background. He did n't believe in hitting a man when he was down, Mr. Samson did n't.

"Better have that pith helmet of mine," he suggested. "That 's the thing for him, Mrs. Jakes. No sense in losin' time while you 're writin' to hatters—what?"

"You 're very good, Mr. Samson," answered Mrs. Jakes, gratefully, pausing by the piano. "I 'll mention it to the doctor in the morning; I 'm sure he 'll be most obliged. He 's—he 's greatly troubled, in case any

of you should feel—well—annoyed, you know, at anything he said."

"Poor Dr. Jakes," said Margaret. "Of course not," chorused the others. "Don't know what he means," added Mr. Samson.

Mrs. Jakes looked from one to another, collecting their responses and reassuring herself.

"He 'll be so glad," she said. "And now, I wonder —*would* you mind if I just played the intermezzo a little again?"

The easy gradual cadences of the music resumed its government of the room as Mrs. Jakes called up images of less poignant days to aid her in her extremity, sitting under the lamplight very upright and little upon the pedestal stool. For the others also, those too familiar strains induced a mood of reflection, and Margaret fell back on a word of Ford's that had grappled at her mind and fallen away again. His mention of the need of a doctor and the difficulty of obtaining one who could be relied upon to keep a shut mouth concerning Dr. Jakes' affairs returned to her, and brought with it the figure of Kamis, mute, inglorious, with his London diploma, wasting his skill and knowledge literally on the desert air. While Mrs. Jakes, quite involuntarily, recalled the flavor of the music-master of years ago, who played of nights a violin in the orchestra of the Putney Hippodrome and carried a Bohemian glamour about him on his daily rounds, Margaret's mind was astray in the paths of the Karoo where wandered under the stars, unaccountable and heartrending, a healer clothed with the flesh and skin of tragedy. She remembered him as she had seen him, below the dam wall, with Paul hanging on his words and the humble

clay gathering shape under his hands, lifting his blunt negro face to her and speaking in deliberate, schooled English of how it fared in Africa with a black man who was not a savage. He had thanked her then very movingly for merely hearing him and being touched by the pity and strangeness of his fate, and had promised to come to her whenever she should signify a wish to speak with him again. The wish was not wanting, but the opportunity had failed, and since then the only token of him had been the scarlet aloe plumes, fruit of the desert gathered in loneliness, which he had conveyed to her by the hands of Fat Mary. Like himself, they came to her unexpected and unexplained, and she had had them only long enough to know they existed.

Her promise to Kamis to keep her acquaintance with him a secret had withheld her so far from sharing the matter with Ford, though she told herself more than once that in his particular case the promise could not apply. With him she was sure there could be no risk; he would take his stand on the clear facts of the situation and be free from the first from the silly violence of thought which complicates the racial question in South Africa. She had even pictured to herself his reception of the news, when he received it, say, across the top of his little easel; he would pause, the palette knife between his fingers, and frown consideringly at the sticky mess before him on the canvas. His lean, sober, courageous face would give no index to the direction of his mind; he would put it to the test of his queer, sententious logic with all due deliberation, till at last he would look up decidedly and commit himself to the reasonable and human attitude of mind. "As

I see it," he would probably begin; or "Well, the position 's pretty clear, I think. It 's like this." And then he would state the matter with all his harsh, youthful wisdom, tempered a little by natural kindliness and gentleness of heart. And all would be well, with a confidant gained into the bargain. But, nevertheless, he had not yet been told.

Mrs. Jakes was perfunctory that evening with her good nights; with all her efforts to appear at ease the best she could do was to appear a little absent-minded. She gave Margaret her breakfast smile instead of her farewell one and stared at her curiously as she stood aside to let the girl pass up-stairs. She had the air of passing her in review.

It seemed to Margaret that she had been asleep for many hours when she was awakened and found the night still dark about her. Some blurred fragments of a dream still clung to her and dulled her wits; she had watched again the passing before the stoep of Van Zyl's captives and seen their dragging feet lift the dust and the hopelessness of their white eyes. But with them, the mounted men seemed to ride to the accompaniment of hoofs clattering as they do not clatter on the dry earth of the Karoo; they clicked insistently like a cab horse trotting smartly on wood pavement, and then, when that had barely headed off her thoughts and let her glimpse a far vista of long evening streets, populous with traffic, she was awake and sitting up in her bed, and the noise was Mrs. Jakes standing in the half-open door and tapping on the panels to wake her. She carried a candle which showed her face in an unsteady, upward illumination and filled it unfamiliarly with shadows.

"What is it?" called Margaret. "Come in, Mrs. Jakes. Is there anything wrong?"

Mrs. Jakes entered and closed the door behind her. She was fully dressed still, even to the garnet brooch she wore of evenings, which she had once purchased from a countess at a bazaar. Stranger far, she wore an embarrassed, confidential little smile as though some one had turned a laugh against her. She came to Margaret's bedside and stood there with her candle.

"My dear," she said; "I know it 's very awkward, but I feel I can trust you. We *are* friends, are n't we?"

"Yes," said Margaret, staring at her. "But what is it?"

"Well," said Mrs. Jakes, very deliberately, and still with the same little smile, "it 's an awkward thing, but I want you to help me. I don't care to ask Mr. Samson or Mr. Ford, because they might not understand. So, as we 're friends—"

"Is anybody dead?" demanded Margaret.

Mrs. Jakes made a shocked face. "Dead. No. My dear, if that was it, you may be sure I should n't trouble you. No, nobody 's dead; it 's nothing of that kind at all. I only just want a little help, and I thought—"

"You 're making me nervous," said Margaret. "I 'll help if I can, but do say what it is."

Mrs. Jakes' smile wavered; she did not find it easy to say what it was. She put her candle down upon a chair, to speak without the strain of light on her face.

"It 's the doctor," she said. "He 's had a—a fit, my dear. He thought a little fresh air would do him good and he went out. And the fact is, I can't quite manage to get him in by myself."

"Eh?" Margaret stared. "Where is he?" she asked.

"He got as far as the road and then he fell," said Mrs. Jakes. "I would n't dream of troubling you, my dear, but I 'm—I 'm rather tired to-night and I really could n't manage by myself. And then I remembered we were friends."

"Not till then?" asked Margaret. "You don't care to wake Mr. Ford? He would n't misunderstand."

"Oh, no—please," begged Mrs. Jakes, terrified. "No, *please*. I 'd rather manage alone, somehow—I would, really."

"You can't do that," said Margaret, decidedly. She sat a space of moments in thought. The doctor's fit did not deceive her at all; she knew that for one of the euphemisms that made Mrs. Jakes' life livable to her. He was drunk and incapable upon the road before the house, and Mrs. Jakes, helpless and frightened, had waked her in the middle of the night to help bring the drunken man in and hide him.

"I 'll help you," she said suddenly. "Don't you worry any more, Mrs. Jakes; we 'll manage it somehow. Let me get some things on and we 'll go out."

"It 's very kind of you, my dear," said Mrs. Jakes humbly. "You 'll put some warm things on, won't you? The doctor would never forgive me if I let you catch cold."

Margaret was fumbling for her stockings.

"I 'm not very strong, you know," she suggested. "I 'll do all I can, but had n't we better call Fat Mary? She 's strong enough for anything."

"Fat Mary! A Kafir!" Mrs. Jakes forgot her caution and for the moment was shrill with protest. "Why—why, the doctor would never hold up his head

again. It would n't do at *all;* I simply could n't *think* of it."

"Oh, well. As you like; I did n't know. Here 's me, anyhow; and awfully willing to be useful."

But Mrs. Jakes had been startled in earnest. While Margaret completed a sketchy toilet she stood murmuring: "A Kafir! Why, the very idea—it would break the doctor's heart."

With her dressing-gown held close about her, Margaret went down-stairs by the side of Mrs. Jakes and her candle, with the abrupt shadows prancing before them on wall and ceiling like derisive spectators of their enterprise. But there was no sense of adventure in it; somehow the matter had ranged itself prosaically and Mrs. Jakes, prim and controlled, managed to throw over it the commonplace hue of an undertaking which is adequately chaperoned. The big hall, solemn and reserved, had no significant emptiness, and from the study there was audible the ticking of some stolid little clock.

The front door of the house was open, and a faint wind entered by it and made Margaret shiver; it showed them a slice of night framed between its posts and two misty still stars like vacant eyes.

"It 's not far," said Mrs. Jakes, on the stoep, and then the faint wind rustled for a moment in the dead vines and the candle-flame swooped and went out.

"You have n't matches, my dear?" enquired Mrs. Jakes, patiently. "No? But we 'll want a light. I could fetch a lantern if you would n't mind waiting. I think I know where it is."

"All right," agreed Margaret. "I don't mind."

It was the first thrill of the business, to be left alone while Mrs. Jakes tracked that lantern to its hiding-place.

Margaret slowly descended the steps from the stoep and sat down on the lowest of them to look at the night. There was a touch of chill in it, and she gathered herself up closely, with her hands clasped around her knees. The wide sleeves of the dressing-gown fell back and left her arms bare to the elbow and the recurring wind, like a cold breath, touched her on the chest where the loose robe parted. The immensity of the night, veiling with emptiness unimaginable bare miles, awed her like a great presence; there was no illumination, or none but the faintest, making darkness only apparent, from the heavenful of pale blurred stars that hung over her. Behind her, the house with those it held was dumb; it was the Karoo that was vocal. As she sat, a score of voices pressed upon her ears. She heard chirpings and little furtive cries, the far hoot of some bold bird and by and by the heartbroken wailing of a jackal. She seemed to sit at the edge of a great arena of unguessed and unsuspected destinies, fighting their way to their fulfilment in the hours of darkness. And then suddenly, she was aware of a noise recurring regularly, a civilized and familiar noise, the sound of footsteps, of somebody walking on the earth near at hand.

She heard it before she recognized it for what it was, and she was not alarmed. The footsteps came close before she spoke.

"Is anybody there, please?" she called.

The answer came at once. "Yes," it said.

"Who is it?" she asked again, and in answer to her question, the night-walker loomed into her view and stood before her.

She rose to her feet with a little breathless laugh, for she recognized him.

"Oh, it 's you," she exclaimed. "Mr. Kamis, is n't it? But what are you doing here at this time of night?"

It was not light enough to see his face; she had recognized him by the figure and attitude; and she was glad. She was aware then that she rather dreaded the negro face of him.

"What are you doing, rather?" he asked. "Does anybody know you 're out here like this? Is it part of some silly treatment, or what?"

"I 'm waiting for Mrs. Jakes," said Margaret. "She 's coming with a lantern in a minute or two and you 'll have to go. It 's all right, though; I shan't take any harm."

"I hope not." He was plainly dissatisfied, and it was very strange to catch the professional restraint in his voice. "Your being here—if I may ask—has n't got anything to do with a very drunk man lying in the road over there?"

"You 've seen him, then?" asked Margaret. "It is just drunkenness, of course?"

He nodded. "But why—?" he began again.

"That 's Dr. Jakes," explained Margaret. "And I 'm going to help Mrs. Jakes to fetch him in, quietly, so that nobody will know. So you see why you must keep very quiet and slip away before she sees you—don't you?"

There was a pause before he answered.

"But, good Lord," he burst out. "This is—this is damnable. You can't have a hand in this kind of thing; it 's impossible. What on earth are these people thinking of? You must n't let them drag you into beastliness of this kind."

"Wait," said Margaret. "Don't be so furious. Nobody is dragging me into anything, and I don't think I 'm a very draggable person, anyhow. I 'd only to be a little shocked once or twice and I should never have heard of this. I 'm doing it because—well, because I want to be useful and Mrs. Jakes came to me and asked, 'Was I her friend?' That is n't very clear to you, perhaps, but there it is."

"Useful." He repeated the word scornfully. "Useful—yes. But do you mean that this is the only use they can find for you?"

"I 'm an invalid," said Margaret placidly. "A crock, you know. I 've got to take what chances I can find of doing things. But it 's no use explaining such a thing as this. If you 're not going to understand and be sympathetic, don't let 's talk about it at all."

He did not at once reply. She stood on the last step but one and looked down towards him where he stood like a part of the night, and though she could see of him only the shape, she showed to him as a tall slenderness, with the faint luminosity of bare arms and face and neck. He seemed to be staring at her very intently.

"Anyhow," he said suddenly—"what is wanted principally is to bring him in. That is so, is n't it? Well, I 'll fetch him for you. Will you be satisfied with that?"

"No, you must n't," said Margaret. "Mrs. Jakes would n't allow it. Never mind why. She simply would n't."

"I know why," he answered. "I 've come across all that before. But this Kafir has seen the state of that white man. That does n't make any difference? No?"

Margaret had shaken her head. "I 'm awfully

sorry," she said. "I feel like a brute—but if you had seen her when I suggested getting help. It was the one thing that terrified her. You see, it 's her I want to help, much more than Dr. Jakes, and she must have her way. So please don't be hurt, will you?"

He laughed a little. "Oh, *that* does n't hurt me," he said. "If it were you, it would be different, but Mrs. Jakes can't help it. However—do you know where this man keeps his drugs?"

"In the study," answered Margaret. "In there, on the left. But why?"

"I 'm a doctor too; you'd forgotten that, had n't you? If I had two or three things I could mix something that would sober him in a couple of minutes."

"Really?" Margaret considered it for a minute, but even that would not do. She could not bring herself to brave Mrs. Jakes' horror and sense of betrayal when she should see the deliverer who came out of the night. And, after all, it was she who had claimed Margaret's help. "We 're friends, are n't we?" she had asked, and the girl had answered "Yes." It was not the part of a friend to press upon her a gift that tasted pungently of ruin and shame.

"No," said Margaret. "Don't offer any more help, please. It hurts to keep on refusing it. But it is n't what Mrs. Jakes woke me up to beg of me and it is n't what I got up from bed to grant her. Can't you see what I mean? I 've told you all about it, and I 'm trusting you to understand."

"I understand," he answered. "But I hate to let you go down to that drunken beast. And suppose the pair of you can't manage him—what will you do then? You 'll have to get help somewhere, won't you?"

"I suppose so," said Margaret.

"Well, get me," he urged, and came a pace nearer, so that only the width of the two bottom steps separated them and she could feel his breath upon the hands that hung clasped before her. "Let me help, if you need it," he begged. "I 'll wait, out of sight. Mrs. Jakes shan't guess I 'm there. But I won't be far, and if you just call quietly, I 'll hear. It—it would be kind of you—merciful to let me bear just a hand. And if you don't call, I 'll not show myself. There can't be any harm in that."

"No," agreed Margaret, uncertainly. "There can't be any harm in that."

She saw that he moved abruptly, and had an impression that he made some gesture almost of glee. But he thanked her in quiet tones for her grace of consent.

Mrs. Jakes, returning, found Margaret as she had left her. She had in her hand one of those stable lanterns which consist of a glass funnel protected by a wire cage, and she spilled its light about her feet as she went and walked in a shifting ring of light through a darkness made more opaque by the contrast. There was visible of her chiefly her worn elastic-sided boots as she came down the steps with the lantern swinging in her hand; and the little feet in those uncomely coverings were somehow appealing and pathetic.

"I found it in Fat Mary's room," she explained. "She nearly woke up when I was taking it."

Margaret wondered whether Kamis were near enough to hear and acute enough to picture the tiptoe search for the lantern by the bedside of snoring Kafirs, the breathless halts when one stirred, the determination

that carried the quest through, and the prosaic matter-of-factness of it all.

They stumbled their way arm in arm across the spit of patched grass that stood between the house and the road, and the lantern diffused about them a yellow haze. Then their feet recognized soft loose dust and they were on the road and moving along it.

"It is n't far," said Mrs. Jakes, in her flat quiet voice. "Be careful, my dear; there are sometimes snakes on the road at night."

Dr. Jakes was apparent first as an indeterminate bulk against the dust that spread before them under the lantern. Mrs. Jakes saw him first.

"He has n't moved," she remarked. "I was rather afraid he might have. These fits, you know—he 's had them before."

She stood at his head, with the lantern held before her, like a sentinel at a lying-in-state, and the whole unloveliness of his slumbers was disclosed. He sprawled upon the road in his formal black clothes, with one arm outstretched and his face upturned to the grave innocence of the night. It had not the cast of repose; he seemed to have carried his torments with him to his couch of dust and to brood upon them under his mask of sleep. What was ghastly was the eyelids which were not fully shut down, but left bare a thin line of white eyeball under each, and touched the broken countenance with deathliness. His coat, crumpled about him and over him, gave an impression of a bloated and corpulent body, and he was stained from head to foot with dust.

Mrs. Jakes surveyed him without emotion.

"He 's undone his collar, anyhow," she remarked.

"Didn't you do it?" asked Margaret, seeing the white ends that rose on each side of his chin.

"No; I forgot," was the answer. "He can't be very bad, since he did that."

Margaret detected the hand of Kamis in this precaution. She said nothing, but stooped with Mrs. Jakes to try to rouse the doctor. The sickening reek of the man's breath affronted her as she bent over him.

Mrs. Jakes shook him and called on him by name in a loud half-whisper, lowering her face close to his ear. She was persuasive, remonstrant; she had the manner of reasoning briskly with him and rousing him to better ways.

"Eustace, Eustace," she called, hushing her tones as though the night and the desert were perilous with ears. "Come, Eustace; you can get up if you try. Make just one effort, now, and you 'll be all right."

The gurgle of his breath was the only answer.

"We 'll have to lift him," she said, staring across his body at Margaret.

"All right," agreed the girl.

"Get hold of his right arm and I 'll take his left," directed Mrs. Jakes. "If we get him on his feet, perhaps he 'll rouse. Are you ready?"

Margaret closed her lips and put forth the strength that she had, and between them they dragged him to a sitting posture, with his head hanging back and his heels furrowed deep in the dust.

"Now, if I can just get behind him," panted Mrs. Jakes. "Don't let go. That 's it. Now! Could you just help to lift him straight up?"

Margaret went quickly to her aid. It had become horrible. The gross carcass in their hands was inert

like a flabby corpse, and its mere weight overtaxed them. They wrestled with it sobbingly, to the noise of their harsh breath and the shuffle of their straining feet on the grit of the road. Suddenly Margaret ceased her laboring and the doctor collapsed once more upon the ground.

"Why did you do that?" cried Mrs. Jakes. "He was nearly up."

"It was my chest," answered Margaret weakly. "It —it hurt."

There was a warm feeling in her throat and a taste in her mouth which she knew of old. She found her handkerchief and dabbed with it at her lips. The feeble light of the lantern showed her the result—the red spots on the white cambric.

"It 's just a strain," said Mrs. Jakes, dully. "That 's all. The doctor will see to it to-morrow. If you rest a moment, you 'll be all right." She hesitated, but her husband and her life's credit lay upon the ground at her feet, and she could not weigh Margaret's danger against those. "You would n't leave me now, my dear?" she supplicated.

"No," said the girl, after a moment's pause. "I won't leave you."

"What 's that?" cried Mrs. Jakes and put a quick frightened hand upon her arm. "Listen! Who is it?"

Steps, undisguised and clear, passed from the grass to the stone steps of the house and ascended, crossed the stoep and were lost to hearing in the doorway.

The two women waited, breathless. It sprang to Margaret's mind that the lantern must have shown her clearly to Kamis, where he waited in the darkness, and he must have seen the climax of her efforts and her

handkerchief at her lips, and gone forthwith to the study for the drugs which would put an end to the matter.

"Look," whispered Mrs. Jakes. "Some one is striking matches—in the study."

The window brightened and darkened again and then lit with a steady glow; the invader had found a candle. Mrs. Jakes dropped Margaret's arm.

"I must see who it is," she said. "Walking into people's houses like this."

Margaret held her back; she was starting forthwith to bring the majesty of her presence to bear on the unknown and possibly dangerous intruder. Mrs. Jakes had a house as well as a husband and could die at need for either.

"No, don't go," said Margaret. "I know who it is. It 's all right, if only you won't be—well, silly about it."

"Who is it, then?" demanded Mrs. Jakes.

Margaret felt feeble and unequal to the position. Her chest was painful, she was cold, and now there was about to be a delicate affair with Mrs. Jakes. She could have laughed at the growing complexity of things, but had the wit not to.

"It 's a doctor," she said; "a real London doctor. He was passing when you left me to get the lantern, and I would n't let him stay because I thought you 'd be annoyed. He 's gone into the house to—"

"Does he know?" whispered Mrs. Jakes, feverishly, thrusting close to her. "Does he know—about this?" Her downward-pointing finger indicated the slumbers of Dr. Jakes. "Say, can't you—does he know?"

"He 'd seen him," said Margaret. "I expect he

loosened the collar—you know. He wanted to help but I would n't let him."

"Is he a friend of yours?" asked Mrs. Jakes again, still in the same agitated whisper.

"Yes," answered Margaret. "He is. It 's all right, really, if only you 'll be sensible and not make a fuss. He 'll help us and then he 'll go away and he 'll say nothing. You did n't think I 'd do anything to hurt you, did you? Are n't we friends?"

Mrs. Jakes stood silent; she asked no questions as to how a London doctor, a friend of Margaret's, chanced to be walking upon the Karoo at night.

"Well," she said at last, with a long sigh; "perhaps we might have needed some help, in any case."

That was all she said, till the footsteps came again across the stoep and down the steps, more deliberately this time, as though something were being carried with precaution. Then they were noiseless for a minute or more on the grass, and at last the figure of Kamis came into the further edge of the lighted circle.

"I had to do it," he said, before either of them could speak, and showed the graduated glass in his hand. "I saw you with your handkerchief."

Margaret, with an instinct of apprehension, looked at Mrs. Jakes. At the first dim view of him, she had roused herself from her dejection, and put on her prim, social face to meet the London doctor effectively. Her little meaningless smile was bent for him; she would make a blameless and uneventful drawing-room of the August night and guard it against unseemly dramatics.

He turned from Margaret towards her and came further into the lamp-light, and she had a clear view of the black face and sorrowful, foolish negro features. She

uttered a gasp that was like a low cry and stood aghast, staring.

"Madam," began Kamis.

She shivered. "A Kafir," she said. "The doctor will never forgive us." And then, wheeling upon Margaret, "And I 'll never forgive you. You said we were friends—and this is what you do to me."

"Mrs. Jakes," implored Margaret. "You must be sensible. It 's all right, really. This gentleman—"

"This gentleman," Mrs. Jakes uttered a passionate spurt of laughter. "Do you mean this nigger? Gentleman, you call it? A London doctor? A friend of yours? A friend. Ha, ha!" She spun round again towards Kamis, waiting with the glass in his hand, the liquid in which shone greenish to the lamp. *"Voetzaak!"* she ordered, shrilly. *"Hamba wena—ch'che. Skellum. Injah. Voetzaak!"*

Kamis stood his ground. He cast a look at Margaret, past Mrs. Jakes, and spoke to her.

"Will she let me give him this?" he asked. "Tell her I am a doctor and this will bring him to very quickly. And then I 'll go away at once and never say a word about it."

"Don't you dare touch him," menaced Mrs. Jakes. "A filthy Kafir—I should think so, indeed."

Kamis went on in the same steady tone. "If she won't you must go in at once and send for another doctor to-morrow. This man ought to be reported."

"You dare," cried Mrs. Jakes. "You 'd report him —a Kafir." She edged closer to the prostrate body of Dr. Jakes and stood beside it like a beast-mother at bay. "I 'll have you locked up—walking into my husband's study like that."

"Mrs. Jakes." Margaret tried once more. "Please listen. If you 'll only let the doctor have this drink, he 'll be able to walk. If you don't, he 'll have to stay here. I *am* your friend; I got up when you came to me and I said I would n't leave you even when I hurt my chest. Does n't that prove that I am? I would n't do you any harm or shame you before other people for anything. What will Dr. Jakes say if he finds out that you let me stay here pleading when I ought to be in bed? He 's a doctor himself and he 'll be awfully annoyed—after telling me I should get well, too. Are n't you going to give him a chance—and me?"

Mrs. Jakes merely glared stonily.

"Come," said Margaret. "Won't you?"

Kamis uttered a smothered exclamation. "I won't wait," he said. "I 'll count ten, slowly. Then Miss Harding must go in and I go away."

"Oh, don't begin that sort of thing," cried Margaret. "Mrs. Jakes is going to be sensible. Are n't you?"

There was no reply, only the stony and hostile stare of the little woman facing them and the gray image of disgrace.

"One," counted Kamis clearly. "Two. Three."

He counted with the stolid regularity of a clock; he made as though to overturn the glass and waste its contents in the dust as soon as he should have reached ten. "Ten," he uttered, but held it safely still. "Well?"

Mrs. Jakes did not move for some moments. Then she sighed and, still without speaking, moved away from the slumbering doctor. She walked a dozen paces from the road and stood with her back to them.

With quick skilful movements, Kamis lifted the unconscious man's head to the crook of his arm and the

rim of the glass clicked on his teeth. Margaret walked after Mrs. Jakes.

"Come," she said gently. "I don't misunderstand. You trusted me or you would n't have waked me. Everything will be all right soon and then you 'll forgive me."

"I won't—never."

Mrs. Jakes would not face her. She stood looking into the blackness, tense with enmity.

"Well, I hope you will," said Margaret.

They heard grunts from the doctor and then quavering speech and one rich oath, and a noise of spitting. The Kafir approached them noiselessly from behind and paused at Margaret's side.

"That 's done the trick," he said; "and he does n't even know who gave him the draft. You 'll go in now?"

"Yes," said Margaret. "You *have* been good, though."

Mrs. Jakes had returned to her husband; they were for the moment alone.

"I did n't mean to force your hand," he whispered. "But I had to. A doctor has duties."

She gave him her hand. "There was something I wanted to tell you, but there 's no time to explain now. Did you know you were wanted by the police?"

"Bless you, yes." He smiled with a white flash of teeth. "Were you going to warn me? How kind! And now, in you go, and good night."

Dr. Jakes was sitting up, spitting with vigor and astonishment. He had taken a heroic dose of hair-raising restoratives on the head of a poisonous amount of

whisky, and his palate was a moldering ruin. But the clearness of his faculties left nothing to be desired.

"Who 's that?" he demanded at sight of Margaret. "Miss Harding. How do you come to be out here at this time?"

"You should time your fits more decently, doctor," answered Margaret coolly.

Mrs. Jakes hastened to explain more acceptably. "I was frightened, Eustace. You looked so bad—and these fits are terrible. So I asked Miss Harding if she would n't come and help me."

"A patient," said the doctor. He turned over and rose stiffly to his feet, dust-stained all over. He stood before her awkwardly.

"I am unfortunate," he said. "You are in my care and this is what happens. It is my misfortune—and my fault. You 'll go back to bed now, Miss Harding, please."

"Sure there 's nothing more you want?" inquired Margaret.

"At once, please," he repeated. "In the morning—but go at once now."

On the stoep she paused to listen to them following after her and heard a portion of Mrs. Jakes' excuses to her husband.

"You looked so dreadful, Eustace, and I was frightened. And then, you 're so heavy, and I suppose I was tired, and to-night I could n't quite manage by myself, dear."

Margaret passed in at the door in order to cough unheard, that nothing might be added to the tale of Mrs. Jakes' delinquencies.

CHAPTER IX

"AND what have we here?" said the stranger loudly. "What have we here, now?"

Paul, sitting cross-legged in his old place under the wall of the dam, with a piece of clay between his fingers, looked round with a start. The stranger had come up behind him, treading unheard in his burst and broken shoes upon the soft dust, and now stood leaning upon a stick and smiling down upon him with a kind of desperate jauntiness. His attitude and manner, with their parody of urbane ease, had for the moment power to hide the miserable shabbiness of his clothes, which were not so much broken and worn as decayed; it was decay rather than hardship which marked the whole figure of the man. Only the face, clean-shaven save for a new crop of bristles, had some quality of mobility and temper, and the eyes with which he looked at Paul were wary and hard.

"Oh, nothing," said Paul, uneasily, covering his clay with one hand. "Who are you?"

The stranger eyed him for some moments longer with the shrewdness of one accustomed to read his fortune in other men's faces, and while he did so the smile remained fixed on his own as though he had forgotten to take it off.

"Who am I!" he exclaimed. "My boy, it 'd take a long time to tell you. But there 's one thing that perhaps you can see for yourself—I 'm a gentleman."

Paul considered this information deliberately.

"Are you?" he said.

"I 'm dusty," admitted the other; "dusty both inside and out. And I 'm travelin' on foot—without luggage. So much I admit; I 've met with misfortunes. But there 's one thing the devil himself can't take away from me, and that 's the grand old name of gentleman. An' now, my lad, to business; you live at that farm there?"

"Yes," replied Paul. This tramp had points at which he differed from other tramps, and Paul stared at him thoughtfully.

"So far, so good," said the stranger. "Question number two: *does* it run to a meal for a gentleman on his travels, an' a bed of sorts? Answer me that. I don't mean a meal with a shilling to pay at the end of it, because—to give it you straight—I 'm out of shillings for the present. Now, speak up."

"If you go up there, they 'll give you something to eat, and you can sleep somewhere," said Paul, a little puzzled by the unusual rhetoric.

The stranger nodded approvingly. "It 's all right, then?" he said. "Good—go up one. But say! Ain't you going there yourself pretty soon?"

"Presently," said Paul.

"Then, if it 's all the same to you," said the stranger, "I 'll wait and go up with you. Nothing like being introduced by a member," he added, as he lowered himself stiffly to a seat among the rank grass under the wall. "Gives a feller standing, don't it?"

He took off his limp hat and let himself fall back against the slope of the wall, grunting with appreciation of the relief after a day's tramp in the sun. His

rather full body and thin legs, ending in a pair of ruinous shoes that let his toes be seen, lay along the grass like an obscene corpse, and above them his feeble, sophisticated face leered at Paul as though to invite him to become its confidant.

"You go on with what you 're doing," urged the stranger. "Don't let me hinder you. Makin' marbles, were you—or what?"

"No," said Paul. He hesitated, for an idea had come to him while he watched the stranger. "But—but if you 'll do something for me, I 'll give you a shilling."

"Eh?" The other rolled a dull eye on him. "It is n't murder, is it? I should want one-and-six for that. I never take less."

Paul flushed. "I don't know what you mean," he said. "I only want you to keep still like that while I—while I make a model of you. You said you had n't got any shillings just now."

"Did I say that?" inquired the stranger. "Well, well! However, chuck us over your shilling and I 'll see what I can do for you."

He made a show of biting the coin and subjecting it to other tests of its goodness while the boy looked on anxiously. Paul was relieved when at last he pocketed it and lay back again.

"I 'll get rid of it somehow," he said. "It 's very well made. And now, am I to look pleasant, or what?"

"Don't look at all," directed Paul. "Just be like —like you are. You can go to sleep if you like."

"I never sleep on an empty stomach," replied the stranger, arranging himself in an attitude of comfort.

"Is this all right for you? Fire away, then, Mike Angelo. Can I talk while you 're at it?"

"If you want to," answered Paul. The clay which he had been shaping was another head, and now he kneaded it out of shape between his hands and rounded it rudely for a sketch of the face before him. The Kafir, Kamis, had bidden him refrain from his attempts to do mass and detail at once, to form the features and the expression together; but Paul knew he had little time before him and meant to make the most of it. The tramp had his hands joined behind his head and his eyes half-closed; he offered to the boy the spectacle of a man beaten to the very ground and content to take his ease there.

"D' you do much of this kind of thing?" asked the tramp, when some silent minutes had passed.

"Yes," said Paul, "a lot."

"Nothing like it, is there?" asked the other. He spoke lazily, absorbed in his comfort. "We 've all got our game, every bally one of us. Mine was actin'."

"Acting?" Paul paused in his busy fingering to look up. "Were *you* an actor?"

The actors he knew looked out of frames in his mother's little parlor, intense, well-fed, with an inhuman brilliance of attire.

"Even me," replied the tramp equably. He did not move from his posture nor uncover his drowsy eyes; the swollen lids, in which the veins stood out in purple, did not move, but his voice took a rounder and more conscious tone as he went on: "And there *was* a time, my boy, when actin' meant me and I meant actin'. In '87, I was playing in 'The Demon Doctor,' and drawing my seven quid a week—you believe *me*. Talk

of art—why! I 've had letters from Irving that 'd make you open your eyes."

"I 've heard about Irving," said Paul, glancing back and fore from his clay to the curiously pouched mouth of his recumbent model.

"Fancy," exclaimed the tramp softly. "But it was a great game, a great game. Sometimes, even now, I sort of miss it. And the funny thing is—it is n't the grub and the girls and the cash in my breeches pocket that I miss so much. It 's the bally work. It 's the work, my boy." He seemed to wonder torpidly at himself, and for some seconds he continued to repeat, as though in amazement: "It 's the work." He went on: "Seems as if once an actor, always an actor, don't it? A feller 's got talent in him and he 's got to empty it out, or ache. Some sing, some write, some paint; you prod clay about; but I 'm an actor. Time was, I could act a gas meter, if it was the part, and that 's my trouble to this day."

He ceased; he had delivered himself without once looking up or reflecting the matter of his speech by a change of expression. For all the part his body or his features had in his words, it might have been a dead man speaking. Paul worked on steadily, giving small thought to anything but the shape that came into being under his hands. His standard of experience was slight; he knew too little of men and their vicissitudes to picture to himself the processes by which the face he strove to reproduce sketchily could have been shaped to its cast of sorrowful pretense; he only felt, cloudily and without knowledge, that it signaled a strange and unlovely fate.

His knack served him well on that evening, and be-

sides, there was not an elusive remembrance of form to be courted, but the living original before him. The tramp seemed to sleep; and swiftly, with merciless assurance, the salient thing about him came into existence between Paul's hands. Long before the light failed or the gourd-drum at the farmhouse door commenced its rhythmic call, the thing was done—a mere sketch, with the thumb-prints not even smoothed away, but stamped none the less with the pitiless print of life.

"Done it?" inquired the tramp, rousing as Paul uncrossed his legs and prepared to put the clay away. "Let 's have a look?"

"It wants to be made smooth," explained Paul, as he passed it to him. "And it 's soft, of course, so don't squeeze it."

"I won't squeeze it," the tramp assured him and took it. He gazed at it doubtfully, letting it lie on his knee. "Oho!" he said.

"It 's only a quick thing," said Paul. "There was n't time to do it properly."

"Was n't there?" said the tramp, without looking up. "It 's like me, is it? Damn you, why don't you say it and have done with it?"

"Why," cried Paul bewildered, and coloring furiously. "What 's the matter? It *is* like you. I modeled it from you just now as you were lying there."

"An' paid me a shilling for it." The tramp thrust an impetuous hand into his pocket; possibly he was inspired to draw forth the coin and fling it in Paul's face. If so, he decided against it; he looked at the coin wryly and returned it to its place.

"Well," he said finally; "you 've got me nicely. The cue is to shy you and your bally model into the

dam together—an' what about my supper? Eh? Yes, you 've got me sweetly. Here, take the thing, or I might make up my mind to go hungry for the pleasure of squashing it flat on your ugly mug."

"You don't like it?" asked Paul, as he received the clay again from the tramp's hands. He did not understand; for all he knew, there were men who surprised their mothers by being born with that strange stamp upon them.

The tramp gave him a slow wrathful look. "The joke 's on me," he answered. "*I* know. I look a drunk who 's been out all night; I 'm not denying it. I 've got a face that 'll get me blackballed for admission to hell. I know all that and you 've made a picture of it. But don't rub it in."

Paul looked at the clay again, and although the man's offense was dawning on his understanding, he smiled at the sight of a strong thing strongly done.

"I did n't mean any joke," he protested.

"Let 's call it a joke," said the tramp. "Once when I was nearly dying of thirst up beyond Kimberly, a feller that I asked for water gave me a cup of paraffin. That was another joke. Tramps are fair game for you jokers, are n't they? Well, if that meal you spoke about was n't a joke, too, let 's be getting up to the house."

"All right," said Paul. He hesitated a minute, for he hated to part with the thing he had made. "Oh, it can go," he exclaimed, and threw the clay up over the wall. It fell into the dam above their heads with a splash.

"I did n't mean any joke, truly," he assured the tramp.

"Don't rub it in," begged the other. "We don't want to make a song about it. And anyhow, I want to try to forget it. So come on—do."

They came together through the kraals and across the deserted yard to the house-door, the tramp looking about him at the apparatus of well-fed and well-roofed life with an expression of genial approval. Paul would have taken him round to the back-door, but he halted.

"Not bad," he commented. "Not bad at all, considering. An' this is the way in, I suppose."

"We 'd better go round," suggested Paul, but the tramp turned on the doorstep and waved a nonchalant hand.

"Oh, this 'll do," he said, and there was nothing for Paul to do but to follow him into the little passage.

The door of the parlor stood open, and within was Mrs. du Preez, flicking a duster at the furniture in a desultory fashion. The tramp paused and looked at her appraisingly.

"The lady of the house, no doubt," he surmised, with his terrible showy smile, before she could speak. "It 's the boy, madam; he would n't take no for an answer. I *had* to come home to supper with him."

His greedy quick eyes were busy about the little room; they seemed to read a price-ticket on each item of its poor pretentious furniture and assess the littleness of those signed and framed photographs which inhabited it like a company of ghosts.

"Why," he cried suddenly, and turned from his inspection of these last to stare again at Mrs. du Preez.

His plausible fluency had availed for the moment to hide the quality of his clothes and person, but now Mrs. du Preez had had time to perceive the defects of both.

"What d' you mean?" she demanded. "How d 'you get in here? Who are you?"

The tramp was still staring at her. "It 's on the tip of my tongue," he said. "Give me a moment. Why"—with a joyous vociferation—"who 'd ha' thought it? It 's little Sinclair, as I 'm a sinnair—little Vivie Sinclair of the old brigade, stap my vitals if it ain't."

"What?"

The man filled the narrow door, and Paul had to stoop under his elbow to see his mother. She was leaning with both hands on the table, searching his face with eyes grown lively and apprehensive in a moment. The old name of her stage days had power to make this change in her.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Think," begged the tramp. "Try! No use? Well—" he swept her a spacious bow, battered hat to heart, foot thrown back—"look on this picture"—he tapped his bosom—"and on that." His big creased forefinger flung out towards the photograph which had the place of honor on the crowded mantelshelf and dragged her gaze with it.

"It 's not—" Mrs. du Preez glanced rapidly back and forth between the living original and the glazed, immaculate counterfeit—"it is n't—it can't be—*Bailey?*"

"It is; it can," replied the tramp categorically, and Boy Bailey, in the too, too solid flesh advanced into the room.

Mrs. du Preez had a moment of motionless amaze, and then with a flushed face came in a rush around the table to meet him. They clasped hands and both laughed.

"Why," cried Mrs. du Preez; "if this don't—but Bailey! Where ever do you come from, an' like this? Glad to see you? Yes, I am glad; you 're the first of the old crowd that I 've seen since I—I married."

"Married, eh?" The tramp tempered an over-gallant and enterprising attitude. "Then I must n't—eh?"

His face was bent towards hers and he still held her hands.

"No; you must n't," spoke Paul unexpectedly, from the doorway, where he was an absorbed witness of the scene.

They both turned sharply; they had forgotten the boy.

"Don't be silly, Paul," said his mother, rather sharply. "Mr. Bailey was only joking." But she freed her hands none the less, while Mr. Bailey bent his wary gaze upon the boy.

The interruption served to bring the conversation down to a less emotional plane, and Paul sat down on a chair just within the door to watch the unawaited results of promising a meal to a chance tramp. The effect on his mother was not the least remarkable consequence. The veld threw up a lamentable man at your feet; in charity and some bewilderment you took him home to feed him, and thereupon your mother, your weary, petulant, uncertain mother, took him to her arms and became, by that unsavory contact, pink and vivacious.

"There 's more of you," said Mrs. du Preez, making a fresh examination of her visitor. "You 're fatter than what you were, Bailey, in those old days."

Boy Bailey nodded carelessly. "Yes, my figure 's

gone too," he agreed; "gone with all the rest. Friends, position, reputation—all but my spirits and my talents. I know. Ah, but those were good times, were n't they?"

"Too good to last," sighed Mrs. du Preez.

"They did n't last for me," said Boy Bailey. "When we broke down at Fereira—lemme see! That must be nearly twenty years ago, ain't it?—I took my leave of Fortune. Never another glance did I get from her; not one bally squint. I did advance agent for a fortune-teller for a bit; I even came down to clerking in a store. I 've been most things a man can be in this country, except rich. And why is it? What 's stood in my way all along? What 's been my handicap that holds me back and nobbles me every time I face the starter?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. du Preez sympathetically.

"I don't need to tell you," continued Boy Bailey, "you not being one of the herd, that it 's temperament that has me all the time. I don't boast of it, but you know how it is. You remember me when I had scope; you 've seen me at the game; you can judge for yourself. A man with temperament in this country has got as much chance as a snowflake in hell. Perhaps, though, you 've found that out for yourself before now."

"Don't I know it," retorted Mrs. du Preez. "Bailey, if you 'll believe me, I have n't heard that word 'temperament,' since I saw you last. Talk of scope—why you can go to the winder there and see with your eyes all the scope I 've had since I married. It 's been tough, Bailey; it 's been downright tough."

"Still—" began Mr. Bailey, but paused. "We must have another talk," he substituted. "There 's a lot to

hear and to tell. Do you think you could manage to put me up for a day or two? I suppose your husband would n't mind?"

"Why should he?" demanded Mrs. du Preez. "You 're the first in all these years. Still, it would n't be a bad idea if you was to have a change of clothes before he sees you, Bailey. It is n't me that minds, you know; so far as that goes, you 'd be welcome in anything; but—"

Boy Bailey waved her excuses away. "I understand," he said. "I understand. It 's these prejudices—have your own way."

The resources of Christian du Preez's wardrobe were narrow, and Christian's wife was further hampered in the selection of clothes for her guest by a doubt whether, if she selected too generously, Christian might not insist on the guest stripping as soon as he set eyes on him. Her discretion revealed itself, when Mr. Bailey was dressed, in a certain sketchiness of his total effect, an indeterminate quality that was not lessened by the fact that all of the garments were too narrow and too long; and though no alteration of his original appearance could fail to improve it, there was no hiding his general character of slow decay.

"It 's hardly a disguise," commented Boy Bailey, as he surveyed himself when the change was made. "Disguise is n't the word that covers it, and I 'm hanged if I know what word does. But these pants are chronic."

"You can roll 'em up another couple of inches," suggested Mrs. du Preez.

"It is n't that," complained Mr. Bailey. "If they want to cover my feet, they can. But I 'd need a waist like a wasp before the three top buttons would

see reason. Damme, I feel as if I was going to break in halves. What 's that dear boy of yours grinning at?"

"I was n't grinning," protested Paul. "I was only going to say that father 's coming in now."

The tramp and his mother exchanged a glance of which the meaning was hidden from him, the look of allies preparing for a crucial moment. Already they were leagued to defeat the husband.

Christian du Preez came with heavy footsteps along the passage from the outer door, saw that there was a stranger in the parlor and paused.

"Christian," said Mrs. du Preez, with a false sprightliness. "Come in; here 's a—an old friend of mine come to see us."

"An old friend?"

The Boer stared at the stranger standing with straddled legs before the fireplace, and recognized him forthwith. Without speaking, he made a quick comparison of the bold photograph, whose fleshy perfection had so often invited him to take stock of his own imperfections, and then met the living Boy Bailey's rigid smile with a smile of his own that had the effect of tempering the other's humor.

"I see," said the Boer. "What 's the name?" He came forward and read from the photograph where the bold showy signature sprawled across a corner. "'Yours blithely, Boy Bailey,'" he read. "And you are Boy Bailey?"

"You 've got it," replied the photograph's original. "Older, my dear sir, and it may be meatier; but the same man in the main, and happy to make the acquaintance of an old friend's husband."

His impudence cost him an effort in face of the Boer's stare of contemptuous amusement, a stare which comprehended, item by item, each article of his grotesque attire and came to rest, without diminishing its intensity, upon the specious, unstable countenance.

"*Allemachtag,*" was the Boer's only reply, as he completed his survey.

"I don't think you saw Bailey, that time we were married, Christian," said Mrs. du Preez. "But he was a dear old friend of mine."

Christian nodded. "You walked here?" he inquired of the guest. On the Karoo, the decent man does not travel afoot, and none of the three others who were present missed the implication of the inquiry. Mrs. du Preez colored hotly; Boy Bailey introduced his celebrated wave of the hand.

"I see you know what walking means," he replied. "It ain't a human occupation—is it now? What I say is—if man had been meant for a *voetganger* (a walker)"—he watched the effect of the Dutch word on the Boer—"he 'd have been made with four feet. Is n't that right? You bet your shirt it is."

"My shirt." Christian seemed puzzled for the moment, though the phrase was one which his wife used. She watched him uneasily. "Oh, I see. Yes, you can keep that shirt you 've got on. I don't want it."

Boy Bailey made him a bow. "Ah, thanks. A shirt more or less don't matter, does it?"

Christian turned to Paul. "You brought him in?"

"Yes," answered Paul.

"Well, come and help me with the sacks. Your mother an' her friend wants to talk, an' we don't want to listen to them talking."

Boy Bailey watched them depart.

"What 's he mean by that?" he asked of Mrs. du Preez.

"Never mind what he means," she answered. "He can't have his own way in everything. Sit down an' tell me about the others an' what happened to them after I left. There was Kitty Cassel—what did she do? Go home?"

Boy Bailey pursed his lips. "No," he answered slowly. "She and I went down to Capetown together. She did n't come to any good, Kitty did n't. Ask me about some one else; I don't want to offend your ears."

But Mrs. du Preez was in error in one particular: Christian had seen Boy Bailey "that time we were married," and remembered him very clearly. Those were days when he, too, lived vividly and the petty incidents and personalities of the moment wrote themselves deep on his boyish mind. As he worked at the empty sacks, telling them over by the stencils upon them, while Paul waded among them to his knees and flung them towards him, he returned in the spirit to those poignant years when a thin girl walking across a little makeshift stage could shake him to his foundations.

He remembered the little town to which the commando had returned to be paid off and disbanded, a single street straggling under a rampart of a gray-green mountain, with the crude beginnings of other streets budding from it on either side, and the big brown, native location like a tuberous root at its lower end. Along its length, beetle-browed shops, with shaded stoeps and hitching-rails for horses, showed interior recesses of shade and gave an illusion of dignified

prosperous commerce, and at the edge of it all there was a string of still pools, linked by a dribble of water, which went by the name of a river and nurtured along its banks gums and willows, the only trees of greater stature than a mimosa-bush that Christian had ever seen.

It was a small, stagnant veld dorp, in fact, one of hundreds that are littered over the face of the Colony, and have for their districts a more than metropolitan importance. Christian knew it as a focus of life, the center of incomprehensible issues and concerns and when his corps returned to it, flavored in its single street the pungencies of life about town. The little war in the neighborhood had drawn to it the usual riff-raff of the country that follows on the heels of troops, wherever armed men are gathered together, predatory women too wise in their generation, a sample or two of the nearly extinct species of professional card-sharper, a host of the sons of Lazarus intent upon crumbs that should fall from the pay-table, and a fair collection of ordinary thieves. These gave the single street a vivacity beyond anything it had known, and the armed burgher, carrying his rifle slung on his back from mere habit, would be greeted by the name of "Piet" and invited to drink once for every ten steps he took upon it.

Hither came Christian—twenty-two years of age, six-foot in his bare soles of slender thew and muscle, not yet bearded and hungry with many appetites after a campaign against Kafirs. The restless town was a bait for him.

At that time, there was much in him of that solemn-eyed quality which came to be Paul's. The steely

women laughed harshly as he passed them by, with all the sweetness of his youth in his still face, his lips parted, his look resting on them and beyond them to the virtues and the delicacy they had thrown off to walk the faster on their chosen road. His ears softened their laughter, his eyes redeemed their bitterness; everything was transfigured for him by the dynamic power of his mere innocence and his potent belief in his own inferiority to the splendor of all that offered itself to his vision. He saw his comrades, fine shots and hard men on the trek, lapse into drunkenness and evil communications, and it was in no way incompatible with his own ascetic cleanliness of apprehension that he excused them on the grounds of the hardships they had undergone. He could idealize even a sot puking in a gutter.

It was here that he saw a stage-play for the first time in his life, sitting in a back-seat in the town hall among young shop-assistants and workmen, not a little distracted between the strange things upon the stage which he had paid to witness and the jocular detachment from them by the young men about him. The play at first was incomprehensible; the chambermaid and the footman, conversing explanatorily, with which it opened, were figures he was unable to recognize, and he could not share the impression that seemed to prevail among the characters in general that the fat, whitish heroine was beautiful. The villain, too, was murderous in such a crude fashion; not once did he make a clean job of an assassination. Christian felt himself competent to criticize, since it was only a week or so since he had pulled a trigger and risen on his elbow to see his man halt in mid-stride and pitch face for-

ward to the earth. He was confirmed in his dissatisfaction by the demeanor of his neighbors; they, men about town, broken to the drama and its surprises, were certainly not taking the thing seriously. After a while, therefore, he made no effort to keep sight of the thread of the play; he sat in an idle content, watching the women on the stage, curious to discover what it was in each one of them that was wrong and vaguely repellent.

His neighbors had no doubts about it. "There 's not a leg in the whole caboodle," one remarked. "It 's all mouth and murder, this is."

Christian did not clearly understand the first phrase, but the second was plain and he smiled in agreement. He looked up to take stock of another character, a girl who made her entrance at that moment, and ceased to smile. Her share in the scene was unimportant enough, and she had but a few words to speak and nothing to do but to walk forward and back again. She was thin and girlish and carried herself well, moving with a graceful deliberation and speaking in an appealing little tinkle to which the room lent a certain ring and resonance; she accosted the villain who replied with brutality; she smiled and turned from him, made a face and passed out again. And that was all.

The young man who had deplored the absence of legs nudged his neighbor to look at the tall young Boer and made a joke in a cautious whisper. His precaution was unnecessary; he might have shouted and Christian would not have heard. He was like a man stunned by a great revelation, sitting bolt upright and staring at the stage and its lighted activity with eyes dazzled by a discovery. For the first time in his life he had seen

a woman, little enough to break like a stick across his knee, brave and gay at once, delicate and tender, touching him with the sense of her strength and courage while her femininity made all the male in him surge into power. Gone was his late attitude of humorous judgment, that could detach the actress from her work and assess her like a cow; the smile, the little contemptuous grimace had blown it all away. He was aghast, incapable of reducing his impression to thoughts. For a while, it did not occur to him that it would be possible to see her again. When it did, he leaned across the two playgoers who were next to him and lifted a program from the lap of the third, who gaped at him but found nothing to say.

"That *meisjie,* the one in a red dress—is her name in this?" he inquired of his neighbor, and surprised him into assistance. Together they found it; the unknown was Miss Vivie Sinclair.

"Skinny, was n't she?" commented the helpful neighbor sociably.

But Christian was already on his feet and making his way out, and the conversational one got nothing but a slow glare for an answer across intervening heads.

And yet the truth of it was, a connoisseur in girls could have matched Miss Vivie Sinclair a hundred times over, so little was there in her that was peculiar or rare. The connoisseur would have put her down without hesitation for a product of that busy manufactory which melts down the material of so many good housemaids to make it into so many bad actresses. Her sex and a grimace—these were the total of her assets, and yet she was as good a peg as another for a cloudy

youth to drape with the splendors of his inexperienced fancy and glorify with the hues of his secret longings. Probably she had no very clear idea of herself in those days; she was neither happy nor sad, as a general thing; and her aspirations aimed much more definitely at the symptoms of success—frocks, bills lettered large with her name, comely young men in hot pursuit of her, gifts of jewelry—than at success itself. As she passed down the main street next morning, on her way to the telegraph office in the town hall, she offered to the slow, appraising looks from the stoeps a sketchy impression of a rather strained modernity, an effect of deftly managed skirts and unabashed ankles which in themselves were sufficient to set Fereira thinking. It was as she emerged from the telegraph office that she came face to face with Christian.

"Well, where d' you think you 're comin' to?"

This was her greeting as he pulled up all standing to avert a collision. Clothes to fit both his stature and his esthetic sense had not been procurable, and he had been only able to wash himself to a state of levitical cleanliness. But his youthful bigness and his obvious reverence of her served his purpose. She stood looking at him with a smile.

"I saw you," he said, "in the play."

"Did you? What d' you think of it?"

"*Allemachtag,*" he answered. "I have been thinking of it all night."

To his eye, she was all she had promised to be. The fragility of her was most wonderful to him, accustomed to the honest motherly brawn of the girls of his own race. The rather aggressive perkiness of her address was the smiling courage that had thrilled and

touched him. He stood staring, unable to carry the talk further.

But it was for this kind of thing that Miss Vivie Sinclair had "gone on the stage," and she was not at all at a loss.

"I 'm going this way," she said, and in her hands, Christian was wax—willing wax. He found himself walking at her side under the eyes of the town. She waited before she spoke again till they were by the stoep of Pagan's store, where a dozen loungers became rigid and watchful as they passed.

"You 've heard about the smash-up?" she inquired then.

"Smash-up?"

"Our smash-up? Oh, a regular mess we 're in, the whole lot of us. You had n't heard?"

"No," he answered.

"Padden 's cleared out. He was our manager, you know, and now he 's run away with the treasury and left us high and dry. Went last night, it seems, after the show."

"Left you?" repeated Christian. The old story was a new one to him and he did not understand. Miss Sinclair thought him dense, but proceeded to enlighten him in words of one syllable, as it were.

"That 's why I was telegraphing," she concluded. "There was a feller in Capetown I used to know; I want to strike him for my fare out of this."

So she was in trouble; there was a call upon her courage, an attack on her defenselessness. Miss Sinclair, glancing sidelong at his face, saw it redden quickly and was confirmed in her hope that the "feller" in Capetown was but an alternative string to her bow.

"That telegram took all I 'd got but a couple of shillings," she added. "Padden had been keeping us short for a long time."

The long street straggled under the sun, bare to its harsh illumination, a wide tract of parched dust hemmed between walls and roofs of gray corrugated iron. The one thing that survived that merciless ordeal of light without loss or depreciation was the girl. They halted at the door of the one-storied hotel where her room was and here again the shaded stoep was full of ears and eyes and Christian had to struggle with words to make his meaning clear to her and keep it obscure to every one else.

"It 'll be all right," he assured her stammeringly. "I 'll see that it 's all right. I 'll come here an' see you."

"When?" she asked, and helped him with a suggestion. "This evening? There 'll be no show to-night."

"This evening," he agreed.

Miss Sinclair gave him her best smile, all the better for the mirth that helped it out. She was as much amused as she was relieved. As she passed the bar on her way indoors, she winked guardedly to a florid youth within who stood in an attitude of listening.

If Christian had celebrated the occasion with libations in the local fashion, if he had talked about it and put his achievement to the test of words—if, even, he had been capable of thinking about it in any clear and sober manner instead of merely relishing it with every fiber of his body—the evening's interview might have resolved itself into an act of charity, involving the sacrifice of nothing more than a few sovereigns. As it was, he spent the day in germinating hopes and

educating his mind to entertain them. Under the stimulating heat of his sanguine youth, they burgeoned superbly.

As he walked away from the hotel, the florid youth spoke confidentially to the fat shirt-sleeved barman.

"Hear that?" he asked. "*She* 'll do all right, she will. That 's where a girl 's better off than a man. Who 's the feller, d' you know?"

The barman heaved himself up to look through the window, and laughed wheezily. He was a married man and adored his children, but it was his business to be knowing and worldly.

"It 's young Du Preez," he answered, as Christian stalked away. "One of them Boers, y' know. Got a farm out on the Karoo."

"Rich?" queried the other.

"Not bad," said the barman. "Most of those Dutch could buy you an' me an' use us for mantel ornaments, if they had the good taste."

"So—ho," exclaimed the florid youth. "But they don't carry it about with 'em, worse luck."

He sighed and grew thoughtful. He was thoughtful at intervals for the rest of the morning, and by the afternoon was melancholy and uncertain of step. But he was on hand and watchful when Christian arrived.

Christian was vaguely annoyed when a young man of suave countenance and an expression of deep solemnity thrust up to him at the hotel door and stood swaying and swallowing and making signs as though to command his attention.

"What d' you want?" he demanded.

"Word with you," requested the other. "Word with you."

He was sufficiently unlike anything that was native to Fereira to be recognizable as an actor and Christian suffered himself to be beckoned into the bar.

"Shall I do it or you?" asked the other. "I shtood so many to-day, sheems to me it 's your turn. Mine 's a whisky. Now, 'bout this li'l girl upshtairs."

"Eh?" Christian was startled.

"I 'm man of the world," the other went on, with the seriousness of the thoroughly drunken. "Know more 'bout the world then ever you knew in yer bally life. An' I don't blame you—norra bit. Now what I want shay is this: I can fix it for you if you 're good for a fiver. Jush a fiver—shave trouble and time, eh? Nice li'l girl, too. Worth it."

Christian watched him lift his glass and drink. He was perplexed; these folk seemed to have a language of their own and to be incomprehensible to ordinary folk.

"Worth it?" he repeated. "Fix *what?*" he demanded.

"Nod 's good 's wink," answered the other. "Don't want to shout it. Bend your long ear down to me—tell you."

They had a corner by the bar to themselves. Near the window the barman had a customer after his own heart and was repeating to him an oracular saying by his youngest daughter but two, glancing sideways while he spoke to see if Christian and the other were listening.

Christian bent, and the hot breath of the other, reeking of the day's drinking, beat on his neck and the side of his head. The hoarse whisper, with its infernal suggestion, seemed to come warm from a pit of vileness within the man's body.

"Is that plain 'nough?"

Christian stood upright again, trembling from head to foot with some cold emotion far transcending any rage he had ever felt. For some instant he could not lift his hand; he had seen the last foul depths of evil and was paralyzed. The other lifted his glass again. His movement released the Boer from the spell.

He took the man by the wrist that held the glass with so deadly a deliberation that the barman missed his hostile purpose and continued to talk, leaning with his fat, mottled arms folded on the bar.

"What you doin', y' fool?" The cry was from the florid youth.

"Ah!" Christian put out his strength with a maniac fury, and the youth's hand and the glass in it were dashed back into that person's face. No hand but his own struck him, and the countenance Christian saw as a blurred white disk broke under the blow and showed red cracks. He struck again and again; the barman shouted and men came running in from outside. Christian dropped the wrist he held and turned away. Those in the doorway gave him passage. On the floor in the corner the florid youth bled and vomited.

Christian knew him later as a bold and serene face in a plush photograph frame, signed across the lower right corner: "Yours blithely, Boy Bailey."

How he made inquiries for the girl's room and came at last to the door of it was never a clear memory to him. But he could always recall that small austere interior of whitewash and heat-warped furniture to which he entered at her call, to find her sitting on the narrow bed. He came to her bereft of the few faculties she had left him, grave, almost stern, gripping himself by

force of instinct to save himself from the outburst of emotion to which the scene in the bar had made him prone. Everything tender and protective in his nature was awake and crying out; he saw her as the victim of a sacrilegious outrage, threatened by unnamable dangers.

She looked at him under the lids of her eyes, quickly alive to the change in him. It is necessary to record that she, too, had made inquiries since the morning, and learned of the farm that stood at his back to guarantee him solid.

"I wondered if you 'd come," she said. "That feller in Capetown has n't answered."

"I said I 'd come," he replied gravely.

"Yes, I know. All the same, I thought—you know, when a person 's in hard luck, nothing goes right, an' a girl, when she 's in a mess, is anybody's fool. Is n't that right?"

She knew her peril then; she lived open-eyed in face of it.

"You shall not be anybody's fool," he answered. "If anybody tries to be bad to you, I 'll kill him."

He was still standing just within the closed door, no nearer to her than the size of the little chamber compelled.

"Won't you sit down?" she invited.

"Eh?" His contemplation of her seemed to absorb him and make him absent-minded. "No," he replied, when she repeated her invitation.

"As you like," she conceded, wondering whether after all he was going to be amenable to the treatment she proposed for him. It crossed her mind that he was thinking of getting something for his money and her silly

mouth tightened. If her sex was one of her assets, her virtue—the fanatic virtue which is a matter of prejudice rather than of principle,—was one of her liabilities. She had nothing to sell him.

"You know," she said, "the worst of it is, none of us have n't had any salary for weeks. That 's what puts us in the cart. We 're all broke. If Padden had let us have a bit, we would n't be stranded like this. And the queer thing is, Gus Padden 's the last man you 'd have picked for a wrong 'un. Fat, you know, and beaming; a sort of fatherly way, he had. He used to remind me of Santa Claus. An' now he 's thrown us down this way, and how I 'm going to get up again I can't say." She gave him one of her shrewd upward glances; tell me," she added.

"I can tell you," he replied.

"How, then?" she asked.

"Marry me," said Christian. "This acting—it 's no good. There 's men that is bad all around you. One of them—I broke his face like a window-glass downstairs just now—he said you was—bad, like him. And it was time to see what he was worth. "Unless you can you are ach—so—so little, so weak. Marry me, my *kleintje* and you shall be nobody's fool."

The girl on the bed stared at him dumbly: this was what she had never expected. Salvation had come to her with both hands full of gifts. She began to laugh foolishly.

"Marry me," repeated Christian. "Will you?"

She jumped up from her seat, still laughing and took two steps to him.

"Will I?" she cried. "Will a duck swim? Yes, I will; yes, yes, yes!"

Christian looked at her dazed; events were sweeping him off his feet. He took one of her hands and dropped it again and turned from her abruptly. With his arm before his face he leaned against the door and burst into weeping. The girl patted him on the back soothingly.

"Take it easy," she said kindly. "You 'll be all right, never fear."

"That 's all the Port Elizabeth ones," said Paul. "How many do you make them?"

Christian du Preez looked up uncertainly. *"Allemachtag,"* he said. "I forgot to count. I was thinking."

"Oh. About the tramp?"

"Yes. Paul, what did you bring him in for? Could n't you see he was a *skellum?"*

Paul nodded. "Yes, I could see that. But—*skellums* are hungry and tired, too, sometimes."

His father smiled in a worried manner. He and Paul never talked intimately with each other, but an intimacy existed of feeling and thought. They took many of the same things for granted.

"Like us," he agreed. "Come on to supper, Paul."

CHAPTER X

IT was nearing the lunch hour when Margaret walked down from the Sanatorium to the farm, leaving Ford and Mr. Samson to their unsociable preoccupations on the stoep, and found Paul among the kraals. He had some small matter of work in hand, involving a wagon-chain and a number of yokes; these were littered about his feet in a liberal disorder and he was standing among them contemplating them earnestly and seemingly lost in meditation. He turned slowly as Margaret called his name, and woke to the presence of his visitor with a lightening of his whole countenance.

"Were you dreaming about models?" inquired Margaret. "You were very deep in something."

Paul shook his head. "It was about wagons," he answered seriously. "I was just thinking how they are always going away from places and coming to more places. That 's all."

"Wishing you had wheels instead of feet? I see," smiled the girl. "What a traveler you are, Paul."

He smiled back. In their casual meetings they had talked of this before and Paul had found it possible to tell her of his dreams and yearnings for what lay at the other end of the railway and beyond the sun mist that stood like a visible frontier about his world.

"I shall travel some day," he answered. "Kamis

says that a man is different from a vegetable because he has n't got roots. He says that the best way to see the world is to go on foot."

"I expect he 's right," said Margaret. "It 's jolly for you, Paul, having him to talk to. Do you know where he is now?"

"Yes," answered the boy.

"Well, then, when can I see him? He told me you could always let him know."

"This afternoon?" suggested Paul. "If you could come down to the dam wall then, he can be there. There is a signal I make for him in my window and he always sees it."

"I 'll come then," promised Margaret. "Thank you, Paul. But that signal—that 's rather an idea. Did you think of it or did he?"

"He did," answered Paul. "He said it would n't trouble him to look every day at a house that held a friend. And he does, every day. There was only once he did n't come, and then he had twisted his ankle a long way off on the veld, walking among ant-bear holes in the dark."

"Which window is it?" asked Margaret.

Paul pointed. "That end one," he showed her.

Margaret looked, and a figure lounging against one of the doorposts of the house took her look for himself and bowed.

"That 's nobody," said Paul quickly. "Don't look that way. It 's—it 's a tramp that came to me—and I gave him a shilling to keep still and be modeled—and he knows my mother—and he 's staying in the house. He 's beastly; don't look that way."

His solicitude and his jealousy made Margaret smile.

"I should n't see him if I did," she said. "Don't you worry, Paul. Then—this afternoon?"

"Under the dam," replied Paul. "Good-by. He 's waiting for a chance to come and speak to you."

"Let him wait," replied Margaret, and turned homewards, scrupulously averting her face from the ingratiating figure of Boy Bailey.

That pensioner of fortune watched her pass along the trodden path to the Sanatorium till she was clear of the farm, and then put himself into easy movement to go across to Paul. The uncanny combination of Christian's clothes and his own personality drifted through the arrogant sunlight and over the sober earth, a monstrous affront to the temperate eye. He was like a dangerous clown or a comical Mephistopheles. Paul, pondering as he came, thought of a pig equipped with the venom of the puff-adder of the Karoo. As he drew near, the boy fell to work on the chain and yokes.

"Well, my dear boy." The man's shadow and his voice reached Paul together. He did not look up, but went on loosening the cross bar of a yoke from its link.

"There 's more in this place of yours than meets the eye at a first glance," said Boy Bailey. "You 're well off, my lad. Not only milk and honey for the trouble of lifting 'em to your mouth, but dalliance, silken dalliance in broad daylight. What would your dear mother say if she knew?".

"I don't know," said the boy. "Ask her?"

"And spoil sport? Laddie, you 'll know me better some day. Not for worlds would I give a chap's game away. It 's not my style. Poor I may be, but not that. No. I admire your taste, my boy. You 've an eye in

your head. But you forgot to introduce the lady to your mother's old friend. However, you 'll be seeing her again, no doubt, an' then—''

''I did n't forget,'' said Paul. Still he did not look up. The iron links shook in his hands, and he detached the stout crosspiece and laid it across his knees.

''Eh?'' Boy Bailey's face darkened a little, and his wary eyes narrowed. He looked down on the boy's bent back unpleasantly.

''You did n't?'' he said. ''I see. Well, well. A chap that 's poor must put up with these slights.'' His slightly hoarse voice became bland again. ''But have it your own way; Heaven knows, *I* don't mind. She 's a saucy little piece, all the same, an' p'r'aps you 're right not to risk her with me. If I got her by herself, there 's no saying—''

He stopped; the boy had looked up and was rising. His face stirred memories in Boy Bailey; it roused images that were fogged by years, but terrible yet. In the instant's grace that was accorded him, he felt his wrist gripped once more and saw the livid clenched face, tense with the spirit of murder, that burned above his ere his own hand and the glass it held were dashed athwart his eyes. The boy was rising and he held the cross-bar of the yoke like a weapon.

Boy Bailey made to speak but failed. With a sort of squeak he turned and set off running towards the house, pounding in panic over the ground with his grotesque clothes flapping about him like abortive wings. Paul, on his feet amid the tangled chains, watched him with the heavy cross-bar in his hand.

If he had any clear feeling at all, it was disappointment at the waste of a rare energy. He could have

killed the man in the heat of it, and now it was wasted. Boy Bailey was whole, his pulpy face not beaten in, his bones functioning adequately as he ran instead of creaking in fractures to each squirm of his broken body. It was an occasion squandered, lost, thrown away. It had the unsatisfying quality of mere prevention when it might have been a complete cure.

Margaret returned to the Sanatorium in time to meet Mrs. Jakes in the hall as she led the way to lunch and to receive the unsmiling movement of recognition which had been her lot ever since the night of Dr. Jakes' adventure. Contrary to Margaret's expectation, Mrs. Jakes had not come round; no treatment availed to convince her that she had not been made a victim of black treachery and the doctor wantonly exposed and humiliated. When she was cornered and had to listen to explanations, she heard them with her eyes on the ground and her face composed to an irreconcilable woodenness. When Margaret had done—she tried the line of humorous breeziness, and it was a mistake—Mrs. Jakes sniffed.

"If you please," she said frigidly, "we won't talk about it. The subject is very painful. No doubt all you say is very true, but I have my feelings."

"So have I," said Margaret. "And mine are being hurt."

"I am extremely sorry," replied the little wan woman, with stiff dignity. "If you wish it, I will ask the doctor to recommend you a Sanatorium elsewhere, where you may be more comfortable."

"You know that is n't what I want," protested Margaret. "This is all very silly. I only want you to understand that I have n't done you any harm and that I

did the best I could and let 's stop acting as if one of us had copied the other's last hat."

"No doubt I am slow of understanding, Miss Harding," retorted Mrs. Jakes formidably. "However—if you have quite finished, I 'm in rather a hurry and I won't detain you."

And she made her escape in good order, marching unhurried down the matted corridor and showing to Margaret a retreating view of a rigid black alpaca back.

Dr. Jakes was equally effective in his treatment of the incident. He went to work upon her lungs quite frankly, sending her to bed for a couple of days and gathering all his powers to undo the harm of which he had been the cause. On the third day, there was a further interview in the study, a businesslike affair, conducted without unnecessary conversation, with monosyllabic question and reply framed on the most formal models. At the close of it, he leaned back in his chair and faced her across the corner of his desk. He was irresistibly plump and crumpled in that attitude, with his sad, uncertain eyes expressing an infinite apprehension and all the resignation of a man who has lost faith in mercy.

"That is all, then, Miss Harding. Unless—?"

The last word was breathed hoarsely. Margaret waited. He gazed at her owlishly, one nervous hand fumbling on the blotting-pad before him.

"There is nothing else you want to say to me?" he asked.

"I can't think of anything," said Margaret.

He continued to look at her, torpidly, helplessly. It was impossible to divine what fervencies of inarticulate emotion burned and quickened behind his mask of im-

mobile flesh. The rumpled hair, short and blond, lay in disorder upon his forehead and his lips were parted impotently. He had to blink and swallow before he could speak again, visibly recalling his wits.

"If you don't tell me, I can't answer," he said, and sighed heavily. He raised himself in his big chair irritably.

"Nothing more, then?" he asked. "Well—take care of yourself, Miss Harding. That 's all you have to do. Whatever happens, your business is to take care of yourself; it 's what you came here for."

"I will," answered Margaret. She wished she could find a plane on which it would be possible to talk to him frankly, without evasions and free from the assumptions which his wife wove about him. But the resignation of his eyes, the readiness they expressed to accept blows and penalties, left her powerless. The gulf that separated them could not be bridged.

"Then—" he rose, and in another pair of moments Margaret was outside the study door in the hall, where Mrs. Jakes, affecting to be concerned in the arrangement of the furniture, examined her in sidelong glances, to know whether she had used the weapon which the doctor's adventure had put into her hand. Apparently there was no convincing her that the girl's intentions were not hostile.

It did not simplify life for Margaret, this enmity of Mrs. Jakes. Lunch and breakfast under her pale, implacable eye, that glided upon everything but skipped Margaret with a noticeable avoidance, had become ordeals to be approached with trepidation. Talk, when there was anything to talk about, died still-born in that atmosphere of lofty displeasure. It was done with a

certain deftness; Mrs. Jakes was incapable of anything crude or downright; and when it was necessary, in order that the state of affairs should not be conspicuous, she could smile towards the wall at the girl's back and spare her an empty word or so, in a way that was sometimes as galling as much more dexterous snubs that Margaret had seen administered. One can "field" a snub that conveys its purpose in its phrasing and return it with effect to the wicket; but there is nothing to be done with the bare word that just stops a gap from becoming noticeable.

Ford was waiting outside the front door when Margaret came out after exercising the virtue of forbearance throughout a meal for which she had had no appetite.

"What 's the row with Mrs. Jakes?" he asked, without wasting words on preamble.

"Oh, nothing," answered Margaret crossly. "You 'd better ask her if you want to know. I 'm not going to tell you anything."

"Well, don't, then. But you could n't arrange a truce for meal-times, could you? It turns things sour—the way you two avoid looking at each other."

"I don't care," said Margaret. "It 's not my fault. I 've been as loyal as anybody—more loyal, I think, and certainly more helpful. I 've done simply everything she asked of me, and now she 's like this."

Ford gave her a whimsical look of question.

"Sure you have n't at some time done more than she asked you?" he inquired.

"Why?" Margaret was surprised. She laughed unwillingly. "Is it shrewdness or have you heard something?"

"I have n't heard a word," he assured her. "But is that it?"

"It 's just your natural cleverness, then? Wonderful," said Margaret. "You ought to go on the stage, really. Yes, that 's what it is—I suppose. And now d' you think she 'll see the reasonable view of it? Not she! I 'm a villain in skirts and if I won't stand it, she 'll ask the doctor to recommend a Sanatorium where I can be more comfortable. And just at this moment, I don't think I can stand much more of it."

"Eh?" Ford scowled disapprovingly. "That 's a rotten thing to say. You don't feel inclined to tell me about it?"

"I can't; I must n't. That 's the worst of it," answered Margaret. "I can't tell you anything."

"At any rate," said Ford, "don't take it into your head to go away. This won't do you any harm in the end. You were n't thinking of it seriously, were you?"

"Was n't I? I was, though. I hate all this."

Ford took a couple of steps toward the door and a couple back.

"It won't weigh with you," he said, "but I 'd be sorry if you went. *I* would, personally—awfully sorry. But if you must go, you must. It 's a thing you can judge for yourself. Still, I 'd be sorry."

Margaret shrugged impatiently.

"Oh, I 'd be sorry, too. It 's been jolly, in a way, with you here, and all that. I 'd miss you, if you want to know. But—"

She stopped. Ford was looking at her very gravely.

"Don't go," he said, and put his thin, sun-browned hand upon her shoulder. "It 'll make things simpler

for me if you say you won't. Things will arrange themselves, but even if they don't—don't go away."

"Simpler? How do you mean?"

"Just that," he answered. "If you stay, here we are—friends. We help each other out and talk and see each other and have time before us and there 's no need to say anything. And it 's because a lunger like me *must n't* say anything till he sees whether he 's going to get well or—or stay here forever, that it 'll be simpler if you don't go. Do you see?"

His hand upon her shoulder was pleasant to feel; she liked the freedom he took—and gave—in resting it there; and his young, serious face, touched to delicacy by the disease that governed him, was patient and wise.

"It 's not because of *that* that you must n't say anything," she answered. "I did n't know—you 've given me no warning. What can I say?"

"Say you won't go," he begged. "Say you won't act on any decision you 've made at present. And then we can go on—me lecturing you, and you flouting me, till—till I can say things—till I 'm free to say what I like to anybody."

She smiled rather nervously. "If I agree now," she answered, "it will look as if—" she paused; the thing was difficult to put in its nicety. But he was quick in the uptake.

"It won't," he said. "I 'm not such a bounder as that."

"But I 'd rather be here than take my chance among other people," she went on. "I suppose I can stand Mrs. Jakes if I give my mind to it, particularly if you 'll see me through."

"I 'll do what I can," he promised. "You 'll do it, then? You 'll stay?"

"I suppose so," said Margaret. His hand for a moment was heavier on her shoulder; she felt as though she had been slapped on the back, with the unceremoniousness of a good friend; and then he loosed her.

"Good of you," he answered shortly.

Both were weighted by the handicap of their race; they had been, as it were, trapped into a certain depth of emotion and self-revelation, and both found a difficulty in stepping down again to the safe levels of commonplace intercourse. Ford shoved both hands into his pockets and half-turned from her.

"Well—doing anything this afternoon?" he inquired in his tersest manner.

"Yes," said Margaret, whom the position could amuse.

"What?"

"Oh—going yachting," she retorted.

He sniffed and nodded. "I 'm going to paint," he announced. "So long."

Margaret smiled at his back as he went, and its extravagant slouch of indifference and ease. She knew he would not look round; once his mood was defined, it was reliable entirely; but she felt she would have forgiven him if he had. The last word in such a matter as this is always capable of expansion, and probably some such notion was in the mind of the oracle who first pronounced that to women the last word is dear.

He was still at his easel when she set forth to keep her appointment under the dam wall, working on his helpless canvas with an intensity that spared not a look as she went by on the parched grass below the stoep. It was a low easel, and he sat on a stool and spread his

legs to each side of it, like a fighter crouched over an adversary, and his thumb was busy smudging among masses of pigment. Margaret could see the canvas as a faintly shining insurrection of colors which suggested that he had broken an egg upon it. A score of times in the past weeks those cryptic messes had irritated her or showed themselves as a weakness in their author. The domineering thumb and the shock tactics of the palette knife had supplied her with themes for ridicule, and the fact that the creature could not paint and yet would paint and refused all instruction had put the seal of bitterness on many a day of weary irritation. But suddenly his incompetence and his industry, and even the unlovely fruit of their union—the canvases that he signed large with his name and hung unframed upon the walls of his room—were endearing; they were laughable only as a little child is laughable, things to smile at and to prize.

Her smiling and thoughtful mood went with her across the grass and dust and around the curved shoulder of the dam wall, where Kamis, obedient to Paul's signal, sat in the shade and awaited her. At her coming he sprang up eagerly with his face alight. His tweed clothes were, if anything, shabbier than before, but it seemed that no usage could subdue them to congruity with the broad black face and its liberal smile.

"This is great luck," he said. "I half expected you 'd find it too hot for you. Are you all right again after that night?"

Margaret seated herself on the slope of the wall and rested with one elbow on the freshness of its water-fed grass.

"Quite all right," she assured him. "Dr. Jakes has

done everything that needed to be done. But I didn't thank you half enough for what you did."

He smiled and murmured deprecatingly and found himself a place to sit on at the foot of the wall, with legs crossed and his back to the sun. Leaning forward a little in this posture, with his drooping hat-brim shadowing him, it was almost possible for Margaret to avoid seeing the blunt negro features for which she had come to feel something akin to dread; they affected her in the same way that darkness with people moving in it will affect some children.

"I saw Paul's signal," said Kamis. "We have an understanding, you know. He hangs a handkerchief in his window when he wants me and when you want me he hangs two. It shows as far as one can see the window; all the others are just black squares, and his has a white dash in it. That 's rather how I see Paul, you know. Other people are just blanks, but he means something—to me, at any rate. By the way, before I forget—did you want me for anything in particular?"

Margaret shook her head. "I wanted to talk," she said; "and to make that police matter clear to you."

"Oh, that." He looked up. "Thank you."

"Do you know of a Mr. Van Zyl, a police-officer?" she asked him. "He thinks you are guilty of sedition among the natives. I suppose it 's nonsense, but he means to arrest you, and I thought you 'd better know."

"It 's awfully good of you to bother about it," he answered. "I 'll take care he does n't lay hands on me. But it *is* nonsense, certainly, and anybody but he would know it. He 's been scouring the kraals in the south for me and giving the natives a tremendous idea of my

importance. They were nervous enough of me before, but now—''

He shrugged his shoulders disgustedly, but still smiled.

''That is what he said—they 're uneasy,'' agreed Margaret. ''But why are they? You see, I know scarcely more of you than Mr. Van Zyl. What is it that troubles them about you?''

''Oh,'' the Kafir deliberated. ''It 's simple enough, really. You see,'' he explained, ''the fact is, I 'm out of order. I don't belong in the scheme of things as the natives and Mr. Van Zyl know it. These Kafirs are the most confirmed conservatives in the world, and when they see a man like themselves who can't exist without clothes and a roof to sleep under, who can't walk without boots or talk their language and is unaccountable generally, they smell witchcraft at once. Besides, it has got about that I 'm Kamis, and they know very well that Kamis was hanged about twenty years ago and his son taken away and eaten by the soldiers. So it 's pretty plain to them that something is wrong somewhere. Do you see?''

''Still''—Margaret was thoughtful—''Mr. Van Zyl is n't an ignorant savage.''

''No,'' agreed Kamis. ''He is n't that. For dealing with Kafirs, he 's probably the best man you could find; the natives trust him and depend on him and when they 're in trouble they go to him and he gives them the help they want. When they misbehave, he 's on hand to deal with them in the fashion they understand and probably prefer. And the reason is, Miss Harding—the reason is, he 's got a Kafir mind. He was born among them and nursed by them; he speaks as a Kafir, under-

stands as a Kafir and thinks as a Kafir, and he 'll never become a European and put away Kafir things. They 've made him, and at the best he 's an ambassador for the Kafirs among the whites. That 's how they master their masters. Oh, they 've got power, the Kafirs have, and a better power than their hocus-pocus of witchcraft."

The afternoon was stored with the day's accumulated heat and the cool of the grass beneath and the freshness of the water, out of sight beyond the wall but diffusing itself like an odor in the air, combined to contrast the spot in which they talked with the dazed sun-beaten land about them and gave to both a sense of privacy and isolation. The Kafir's words stirred a fresh curiosity in Margaret.

"He thinks you are making the natives dangerous," she said. "I don't believe that, of course, but what are you doing?"

"What am I doing?"

The black face was lifted to hers steadily and regarded her for a space of moments without replying. Nothing mild or subtle could find expression in its rude shaping of feature; the taciturnity of the Karoo itself governed it.

"What am I doing?" repeated Kamis. He dropped his eyes and his hands plucked at the grass absently. "Well, I 'm looking for a life for myself."

Margaret waited for him to continue but he was silent, plucking the grass shoots and shredding them in his fingers.

"A life," she prompted. "Yes; tell me."

Kamis finished with the grass in his hand and threw it with an abrupt gesture from him.

"I 'll tell you if you like," he said, as though suppressing a feeling of reluctance. "It is n't anything wonderful; still—. You know already how I began; Paul told me how you learnt that; and you can see where I 've got to with my education and my degree and my profession and all that. I 'm back where I came from, and besides what I 've learned, I 've got a burden of civilized habits and weaknesses that keep me tied by the leg. I need friendship and company and equality with people about me, just as you do, and I 'm apt to find myself rather forlorn and lost without them. In England, I had those things—I had some of them, at any rate; but what was there for a black doctor to do, do you think, among all those people who look on even a white foreigner as rather a curiosity?"

"Was n't there anything?" Margaret was watching the nervous play of his gesticulating hands, so oddly emphasizing his pleasant English voice.

"Nothing worth while. That 's another of my troubles, you see. They taught me and trimmed me till I could n't be content with occasional niggers at the docks suffering from belaying-pin on the brain. It was n't odd jobs I wanted, handed over to me to keep me happy; I wanted work. We niggers, we 're a strong lot and we can stand a deal of wear and tear, but we don't improve by standing idle. I wanted to come out of that glass case they kept me in, with tutors and an allowance from the Government and an official guardian and all that sort of thing, and make myself useful."

He paused. "You understand that, don't you?" he asked.

"Of course I do," replied Margaret. "If I could only come out too! But I 've got all those weaknesses

of yours and this as well." Her hand rested on her chest and he nodded.

"You 're different," he said. "You must n't be worn and torn."

"Well, so you came out here?"

"It 's my country," he answered, and waved a hand at its barrenness. "It was my father's, a good deal of it, in another sense too. When I saw that living in England was n't going to lead to anything, I thought of this. Somebody ought to doctor the poor beggars who live here and give them a lead towards a more comfortable existence, and I hoped I was the man to do it. I must have relations among them, too; that 's queer, is n't it? Aunts—my father had lots of wives—and lashings of cousins. I thought the steamer was bringing me out to them and I had a great idea of a welcome and all that; but I 'm no nearer it now than I was when I started. If ever I seem too grateful to you for your acquaintance, Miss Harding—if I seem too humble to be pleasant when I thank you for letting me talk to you—just remember I know that over there my poor black aunts are slaving like cattle and my uncles are driving them, and when I come they dodge among the huts and manœuver to get behind me with a club."

"No," answered Margaret slowly. "I 'll remind you instead of all you 're doing while I do nothing."

He shook his head. "I know what you do to me," he said. "And I can't let you pity me. It was n't for want of warnings I came out here. I even had a letter from the Colonial Secretary. And I must tell you about the remonstrances of my guardian."

He laughed, with one of those quick transitions of

mood which characterize the negro temperament. It jarred a little on Margaret.

"He was the dearest old thing," he went on. "He 's one of the greatest living authorities on the Bantu tongues—those are the real old negro languages, I believe—and he was out here once in his wild youth. The Colonial Office appointed him to take charge of me and he used to come down to the schools where I was and give me a sovereign. He 'd have made a capital uncle. He had a face like a beefy rose, one of those big flabby ones that tumble to pieces when you pick them—all pink and round and clean, with kind, silly blue eyes behind gold spectacles. I had to get his consent before I could move, and I went to see him in a little room at the British and Foreign Bible Society's place in Queen Victoria Street, where they grow the rarer kinds of Bible under glass in holes in the wall; you know. He was correcting the proofs of a gospel in some Central African dialect and he had smudges of ink round his mouth. Sucking the wrong end of the pen, I suppose. He really was rather like a comic-paper professor, but as kind as could be. I sat down in the chair opposite to him, with the desk between us, and he heard what I 'd got to say, wiping his pen and sucking it while I told him. I fancy I began by being eloquent, but I soon stopped that. He 's good form to the finger-tips and he looked so pained. So I cut it short and told him what I wanted to do and why. And when I 'd finished, he gave me a solemn warning. I must do what seemed right to me, he said; he would n't take the responsibility of standing in my way; but there were grave dangers. He had known young men, promising young men, talented young

men—all negroes, of course—who had returned to Africa after imbibing and accepting the principles of our civilization. They, it was true, were West Africans, but my danger was the same. They had left England in clothes, with a provision of soap in their trunks, and the result of their return to their own place was—they had lapsed! They had discontinued the clothes and forsworn the soap. 'One of them,' he said, 'presented a particularly sad example. He whom we had known and respected as David Livingstone Smith became the leader of a faction or party whose activities necessitated the despatch of a punitive expedition. Under a name which, being interpreted, signifies "The Scornful," he presided over the defeat and massacre of that armed force.' And he went on warning me against becoming an independent monarch and forcing an alliance on Great Britain by means of an ingenious war. He seemed relieved when I assured him that I had no ambition to sit in the seat of the Scornful."

He laughed again, looking up at Margaret with his white teeth flashing broadly.

"Yes," she said. "That was—funny."

Odd! It made her vaguely restive to hear the Kafir make play with the shortcomings of the white man. It touched a fund of compunction whose existence she had not suspected. Something racial in her composition, something partizan and unreasoning, lifted its obliterated head from the grave in which her training and the conscious leanings of her mind had buried it.

He had no thoughts of what it was that kept her from returning his smile. He imagined that his mission, his loneliness and his danger had touched her and made her grave.

"Well, you see how it all came about?" he went on. "It is n't really so extraordinary, is it? And I 'm not discouraged, Miss Harding. I shall find a way, sooner or later; they 're bound to get used to me in the end. In the meantime, Paul is teaching me Kafir, and there 's you. You make up to me for a lot."

"Do I?" Margaret roused herself and sat up, deliberately thrusting down out of her consciousness that instinctive element which bade her do injustice and withhold from the man before her his due of acknowledgment.

"Do I?" she said. "I 'd be glad if that were so."

He made to speak but stopped at her gesture.

"No," she said. "I *would* be glad. It 's a wonderfully great thing you 've started to do, and you 're lucky to have it. You feel that, don't you?"

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "Oh, yes."

She eyed him with a moment's hesitation, for he had not agreed with any alacrity, and a martyr who regards his stake with aversion is always disappointing.

"Oh, you 're sure to succeed," she said. "People who undertake things like this don't fail. And if, as you say, I 'm any kind of help to you, I 'm glad. I 'm awfully glad of it. It makes coming out here worth while, and I shall always be proud that I was your friend."

"Will you? Does it strike you like that?"

"Yes," said Margaret.

She was above him on the bank and he sat on the ground with his head at the level of her knees. His worn and shabby clothes, the patience of his face, and even the hands that lay empty in his lap, joined with his lowly posture to give him an aspect of humility.

He was like a man acclimatized to oppression and ill fortune, accepting in a mild acquiescence, without question and without hope, the wrongs of a tyrannous destiny.

"I shall be proud," she repeated. "Always." She held forth her hand to him in token of that friendship, leaning down that he might take.

He did not do so at once. His eyes flashed to her with a startled glance, and he seemed at a loss. He lifted himself to his knees and put his own hand, large and fine for all the warm black of the back of it, the hand of a physician, refined to nice uses, under hers without clasping it. His movement had some of the timidity and slavishness of a dog unused to caresses; a dumb-brute gratitude was in his regard. He bent his black head humbly and printed a kiss upon her slender fingers.

It was a thing that exhausted the situation; Margaret, a little breathless and more than a little moved, met his gaze as he rose with a smile that was not clear of embarrassment. Neither knew what to say next; the kiss upon her hand had transformed their privacy into secrecy.

"My love is like a black, black rose."

It sounded above them, from the top of the dam wall, an outrageous bellow of melody that thrust itself obscenely between them and split them asunder with the riving force of a thunderbolt. Intolerably startled by the suddenness of it, Margaret nearly fell down the slope, and saving herself with her hands turned her face, whitened by the shock, towards the source of the

noise. Another face met hers, parting the long grasses on the crown of the wall.

Her amazed and ambushed faculties saw it as a face only. It was attached to no visible body, solitarily self-sufficient in an unworthy miracle. It did not occur to her that the owner of it must be lying on his belly at the water's edge, and for the moment she was not equal to deducing that he must have heard, and possibly even seen, all that had passed. She saw merely a face projected over her, that grinned with a fixity that was not without an imbecile suggestion. It was old with a moldy and decayed quality, bunched into pouches between deep wrinkles, and yet weak and appealing. A wicked captive ape might show that mixture of gleeful sin and slavishness.

"Don't think I 'm not shocked, because I am," it uttered distinctly. "Kissing! *I* saw you. An' if anybody had told me that a lady of your looks would take on a Kafir, I would n't ha' believed it."

The face heaved and rose and lifted to corroborate it the cast-off clothes of Christian du Preez, enveloping the person of Boy Bailey. He shuffled to a sitting position on the edge of the wall, and it was a climax to his appearance that his big and knobly feet were bare and wet. He had been taking his ease with his feet in the water while they talked below, a hidden audience to their confidences. He shook his head at them.

"Dam walls have got dam ears," he observed. "You naughty things, you."

Margaret turned helplessly to Kamis for light.

"What is it?" she asked.

He had jumped to his feet and away from her at the first sound, and now turned a slow eye upon her.

The negro countenance is the home of crude emotions; the untempered extremes have been its sculptors through the ages. Its mirth is a guffaw, its sorrow is a howl, its wrath is the naked spirit of murder. He looked at her now with a face alight and transfigured with slaughterous intention.

"Go away," he said, in a whisper. "Go away now. He must have heard. I 'll deal with him."

"Don't," said Margaret. She rose and put a hand on his arm. "Will you speak to him, or shall I?"

"Not you," he answered quickly. "But—" he was breathless and his face shone as with a light sweat. "He 'll *tell,*" he urged, still whispering. "You don't know—it would be frightful. Go quickly away and leave me with him."

"They 're at it still," sounded the voice above them. "Damme, they can't stop."

Kamis was desperate and urgent. He cast a wild eye towards the man on the top of the wall, and went on with agitated earnestness.

"I tell you, you don't know. It 's enough that you were here with a Kafir and he kissed your hand." He slapped his forehead in an agony. "Oh, I ought to be hanged for that. They 'll never believe—nobody will. In this country that sort of thing has only one meaning—a frightful one. I can't bear it. If you don't go"—he gulped and spoke aloud—"I 'll go up and kill him before your eyes."

"Now, now!" The voice remonstrated in startled tones.

Margaret still had her hand on his arm, and could feel that he was trembling. She had recovered from the shock of the surprise and was anxious to purge the

situation of the melodramatic character which it seemed to have assumed. Kamis' whispered fears failed to convince her.

"You 'll do nothing of the kind," she said. "I don't care what people think. Speak to the man or I will."

Kamis lifted his head obediently.

"Come down," he said. "Come down and say what you want."

Mr. Bailey recovered his smile as he shook his head.

"I can say it here," he replied. "Don't you worry, Snowball; it won't strain my voice."

Kamis gulped. "What do you want?" he repeated.

"Ah! What?" inquired Boy Bailey rhetorically. "I come here of an afternoon to collect my thoughts an' sweeten the dam by soaking my Trilbies in it an' what happens? I 'm half-deafened by the noise of kissing. I look round, an' what do I see? I ask you—what?"

He brought an explanatory forefinger into play, thick and cylindrical like a damaged candle.

"First, thinks I, here 's a story that 's good for drinks in any bar between Dopfontein and Fereira —with perhaps a tar-and-feathering for the young lady thrown in." He nodded meaningly at Margaret. "And it would n't be the first time *that 's* happened either."

"Ye–es," said Kamis, who seemed to speak with difficulty. "But you won't get away alive to tell that story."

"Hear me out." Boy Bailey shook his finger. "That 's what I thought *first*. My second thought was: what 's the sense of making trouble when perhaps there 's a bit to be got by holdin' my tongue? How does that strike you?"

Margaret had been leaning on her stick while he spoke, prodding the earth and looking down. Now she raised her eyes.

"The first thought was the best," she said. "You won't get anything here."

"Eh?" Mr. Bailey was astonished. "You don't understand, Miss," he said. "Ask Snowball, there—he 'll tell you. In this country we don't stand women monkeying with niggers. Hell—no. It 's worth, well—"

"Not a penny," said Margaret. "I don't care in the least whom you tell. But—not one penny."

Kamis was listening in silence. Margaret smiled at him and he shook his head. On the top of the wall Mr. Bailey leaned forward persuasively. He had something the air, in so far as his limitations permitted, of benevolence wrestling with obstinacy, the air which in auctioneers is an asset.

"You don't mean that, I know," he said indulgently. "I can see you 're going to be sensible. You would n't let a trifle of ready money stand between you an' keepin' your good name—a nice, ladylike girl like you. Why, for less than what you 've done, women have been stoned in the streets before now. Come now; I 'm not going to be hard on you. Make an offer."

He sat above them against the sky, beaming painfully, always with a wary apprehension at the back of his regard.

"You won't go away?" demanded Kamis suddenly. "You won't? You know I can't do it if you 're here. Then I 'm going to pay."

"You shan't," retorted Margaret. "I won't have it, I tell you. I don't care what he does."

"I 'm going to pay," repeated Kamis. "It 's that or—you won't go away?"

"No," said the girl angrily.

"Then I 'm going to pay." He turned from her. "I 'll give you twenty pounds," he called to Bailey.

"Double it," replied Boy Bailey promptly; "add ten; take away the number you thought of; and the answer is fifty pounds, cash down, and dirt cheap at that. Put that in my hand and I 'll clear out of here within the hour and you 'll never hear of me again."

Kamis nodded slowly. "If I do hear of you again," he said, "I 'll come to you. Paul will bring you the money to-morrow morning, and then you 'll go."

"Right-O." Mr. Bailey rose awkwardly to his feet and made search for his boots. With them in his hands, he looked down on the pair again.

"It 's your risk," he warned them. "If that cash don't come to hand, you look out; there 'll be a slump in Kafirs."

He went off along the wall, disappearing in sections as he descended its shoulder. His gray head in its abominable hat was the last to disappear; it sailed loftily, as became the heir to fifty pounds.

Margaret frowned and then laughed.

"What an absurd business," she cried. "Supposing he had told and there had been a row—it would have been better than this everlasting stagnation. It would have been more like life."

The Kafir sighed. "Not life," he answered gently. "Not your life. It meant a death in life—like mine."

His embarrassed and mournful look passed beyond her to the Karoo, spreading its desolation to the skies as a blind man might lift his eyes in prayer.

CHAPTER XI

THE deplorable hat which shielded Mr. Bailey from the eye of Heaven traveled at a thoughtful pace along the path to the farmhouse, cocked at a confident angle upon a head in which faith in the world was re-established. Boy Bailey had no doubt that the money would be forthcoming. What he had heard of the conversation between Margaret and Kamis had assured him of the Kafir's resources and he felt himself already as solvent as if the minted money were heavy in his pockets. A pleasant sense of security possessed his versatile spirit, the sense that to-morrow may be counted upon. For such as Mr. Bailey, every day has its price.

He gazed before him as he walked, at the house, with its kraals clustered before it and its humble appanage of out-buildings, with a gentle indulgence for all its primitive and domestic quality. Meals and a bed were what they stood for, merely the raw framework of intelligent life, needing to be supplemented and filled in with more stimulating accessories. They satisfied only the immediate needs of a man adrift and hungry; they offered nothing to compensate a lively mind for its exile from the fervor of the world. Fifty pounds, the fine round sum, not alone made him independent of its table and its roof, but opened afresh the way to streets and lamplight, to the native heath of the wandering Bailey, who knew his fellow men from above and

below—Kafirs, for instance, he saw from an altitude —but had few such opportunities as this of meeting them on a level of economic equality. There came to him, as he dwelt in thought upon his good fortune, a clamorous appetite for what fifty pounds would buy. Capetown was within his reach, and he recalled small hotels on steep streets, whose back windows looked forth on flat roofs of Malay houses, where smells of cooking and people loaded the sophisticated air and there was generally a woman weeping and always a man drunk. A little bedroom with an untidy bed and beer bottles cooling in the wash-hand basin by day; saloons where the afternoon sun came slanting upon furtive men initiating the day's activities over glasses; the electric-lit night of Adderley Street under the big plate-glass windows, where business was finished for the shops and offices and newly begun for the traders in weakness and innocence—he knew himself in such surroundings as these. He could slip into them as noiselessly as a snake into a pool, with no disturbance to those inscrutable devotees of daylight and industry who carry on their plain affairs and downright transactions without suspecting the existence of the world beneath them, where Boy Bailey and his fellows stir and dodge and hide and have no illusions, save that hunger is ever fed or thirst quenched.

He paused at the open door of the farmhouse, recalled to the present by the sound of voices from the kitchen at the end of the passage, where Christian du Preez and his wife were engaged in bitter talk. Boy Bailey stepped delicately over the doorstep on to the mat within and stood there to listen, if there should be anything worth listening to. A smile played over his

large complacent features, and he waited with his head cocked to one side. Something in which the word "tramp" occurred as he came through the door flattered him with the knowledge that the dispute was about himself.

Mrs. du Preez spoke, and her shrill tones were plainly audible.

"I don't make no fuss when your dirty old Doppers outspan here an' come sneakin' in for coffee, an' some of them would make a dog sick. Bailey 's got his troubles, but he don't do like Oom Piet Coetzee did when—"

An infuriate rumble from Christian broke in upon her. Boy Bailey smiled and shook his head.

"Now, now," he murmured. "Language, please."

"He 's worse than a Kafir in the house," Christian went on. "Woman, it makes me sick when he looks at you, like an old silly devil."

"So long as he don't look like an old silly Dutchman, I don't mind," retorted his wife. "I 'm fairly sick of it all—you an' your Doppers and all. And just because you can't tell when a gentleman 's having his bit of fun, you come and howl at me."

"Howl." The word seemed to sting. "Howl. Yes, instead of howling I should take my gun and let him have one minute to run before I shoot at him. You like that better, eh? You like that better?"

"Christian." There was alarm in Mrs. du Preez's voice. Behind the shut door of the kitchen, Bailey could picture Christian reaching down the big Martini that hung overhead with oiled rags wrapped about its breech.

"Time for me to cut in at this," reflected Mr. Bailey. "I never was much of a runner."

He walked along the passage with loud steps, acting a man returned from a constitutional, restored by the air and at peace with the whole human race.

Mrs. du Preez and Christian were facing one another over the length of the table; they turned impatient and angry faces towards the door as he opened it and thrust his personality into the scene. He fronted them with his terrible smile and his manner of jaunty amity.

"Hot, ain't it?" he inquired. "I 've been down by the dam and the water 's nearly on the boil."

Neither answered; each seemed watchful of the other's first step. Christian gave him only a dark wrathful look and Mrs. du Preez colored and looked away. Boy Bailey, retaining his smile under difficulties, tossed his hat to a chair and entered.

"Not interrupting anything, am I?" he inquired.

"You 're not interrupting *me*," replied Mrs. du Preez. "I 've said all I 'd got to say."

"But I have n't said all I 've got to say," retorted Christian from his end of the table. "We was talking about you."

"About me?" said Bailey, with mild surprise. "Oh."

"Yes." The Boer, leaning forward with his hands gripping the thick end of the table, had a dangerous look which warned Bailey that impudence now might have disastrous consequences.

"Yes—about you. My wife says you are a gentleman and got gentleman's manners and you are her old friend. She says you don't mean harm and you don't look bad and dirty. She says I don't know how

gentlemen speak and look and I am wrong to say you are a beast with the mark of the beast."

Bailey shifted uncomfortably under his gaze of fury held precariously in leash, and edged a little towards Mrs. du Preez. He was afraid the big, bearded man might spring forward and help out his words with his fist.

"Very kind of Mrs. du Preez," he murmured warily.

"She says all that. But *I* say"—the words rasped from Christian's lips—"*I* say you are a man rotten like an old egg and the breath in your mouth is a stink of wickedness. And I tell her that sometimes I get up from my food and go out because if I don't I shall stamp you to death. *Gott verdam!* Your dirty eyes and your old yellow teeth grinning—I stand them no longer. You have had rest and *skoff*—now you go."

Bailey's face showed some discomposure. His disadvantage lay in the danger that the Boer was plainly willing to be violent. He had returned to the house with the intention of announcing that on the morrow he would take his departure, but it was not the prospect of spending a night in the open that disconcerted him. It was simply that he disliked to be treated thus loftily by a man he despised. He stole a glance at Mrs. du Preez.

She was staring at her husband with shrewdness and doubt expressed in her face, as though she were checking her valuation of him by the fierce figure at the other end of the table, with big, leathery hands clutched on the edge of the board and thin, sun-tanned face intent and wrathful above the uneven beard. She was revisiting with an unsympathetic eye each feature of that irreconcilable factor in her life, her husband.

"D' you hear me?" thundered the Boer. "You go."

He pointed with sudden forefinger to the door, and his gesture was unspeakably daunting and wounding.

"Ye–es," hesitated Boy Bailey, and sighed. The pointing finger compelled him like a hand on his collar, and he moved with shuffling and unwilling feet to the chair where his hat lay. He fumbled with it as he picked it up and it fell to the floor. The finger did not for a moment pretermit its menacing command. He sighed again and drew the door open.

"Bailey." Mrs. du Preez spoke sharply, with a trembling catch in her voice. "Bailey, you stop here."

"Eh?" He turned in the doorway with alacrity. Another moment and it might have been too late.

"Go on," cried the Boer. "Out you go, or I 'll—"

"Stop where you are, Bailey," cried Mrs. du Preez.

She came across the room with a run and put herself in front of Bailey, facing her husband.

"Now," she said, "*now* what d' you think you 'll do?"

The Boer heaved himself upright, and they fronted one another stripped of all considerations save to be victor in the struggle for the fate of Boy Bailey. It was the iron-hard cockney against the Boer.

"I told him to go," said Christian. "If he does n't go—I 'll shoot."

He cast an eye up to the gun in its place upon the wall.

"You will, will you?" The bitter voice was mocking. "Now, Christian, you just listen to me."

"He 'll go," said the Boer.

"Oh, he 'll go," answered Mrs. du Preez. "He 'll go all right, if you say so. But mark my words. You

go turning my friends out of the house like this, and so help me, I 'll go too. Get that straight in your head, old chap—it 's right. Bailey 's not fretting to stay with you, you know. You 're not such good company that you need worry about it. It 's me he came to see, not you. And you pitch him out; that 's all. Bailey goes to-night, does he? Then I go in the morning."

She nodded at him, the serious, graphic nod that promises more earnestly than a shaken fist.

"What!" The Boer was taken by surprise. "If he goes—"

"I 'll go—yes."

She was entirely in earnest; her serious purpose was plain to him in every word she spoke. She threatened that which no Boer could live down, the flight of a wife. He stared at her almost aghast. In the slow processes of his amazed mind, he realized that this, too, had had to come—the threat if not the deed; it was the due and logical climax of such a marriage as his. Her thin face, still pretty after its fashion, and her slight figure that years had not dignified with matronly curves, were stiffened to her monstrous purpose. Whether she went or not, the intention dwelt in her. It was another vileness in Boy Bailey that he should have given it the means of existence.

Both of them, his wife and Mr. Bailey, screened by her body, thought that he was vanquished. He stood so long without answering that they expected no answer. Bailey was framing a scene for the morrow in which he should renounce the reluctant hospitality of the Boer: "I can starve, but I can't stand meanness."

He had got as far as this when the Boer recovered himself.

With an inarticulate cry he was suddenly in motion, irresistibly swift and forceful. A sweep of his arm cleared Mrs. du Preez from his path and sent her reeling aside, leaving Boy Bailey exposed. Christian seemed to halt at the threshold of the room and thrust a long arm out, of which the forked hand took Boy Bailey by the thick throat and dragged him in. He held the shifty, ruined face, now contorted and writhen from his grip like the face of a hanged man, at the level of his waist and beat upon it with the back of his unclenched right hand again and again. Boy Bailey's legs trailed upon the floor lifelessly; only at each dull blow, thudding like a mallet on his blind face, his weak arms fluttered convulsively. Mrs. du Preez, who had fallen against the table, leaned forward with hands clasped against her breast and watched with a fascinated and terror-stricken stare.

Boy Bailey uttered a windy moan and Christian dropped him with a gesture of letting fall something that defiled his hand. The beaten creature fell like a wet towel and was motionless and limp about his feet. Across his body, Christian looked at his wife. He seemed to her to tower above that meek and impotent carcass, to impend hatefully and dreadfully.

"Throw water on him," he said. "In an hour, I will come back and if I see him then, I will shoot."

She did not answer, but continued to stare.

"You hear?" he demanded.

She gulped. "Yes."

"Good," he said. He stepped over the body of Boy

Bailey and mounted on a chair, where he reached down the rifle. He gave his wife another look; she had not moved. He shrugged and went out with the gun under his arm.

It was not till the noise of his steps ceased at the house-door that Mrs. du Preez moved from her attitude of defeat and fear. She came forward on tiptoe, edged past Boy Bailey's feet and crouched to peer round the doorpost. She had to assure herself that Christian was gone. She went furtively along the passage and peeped out over the kraals to be finally certain of it and saw him, still with the gun, walking down to the further fold where Paul was knee-deep in sheep. She came back to the room and closed the door carefully, going about it with knitted brows and a face steeped in preoccupation. Not till then did she turn to attend to Boy Bailey.

"Oh, God," she cried in a startled whisper as she bent above him, for his eyes were open in his bloody face and the battered features were feeling their way to the smile.

She fell on her knees beside him.

"Bailey," she said breathlessly. "I thought you—I thought he 'd killed you."

Boy Bailey rose on one elbow and felt at his face.

"Him!" he exclaimed, with all the scorn that could be conveyed in a whisper. "Him! He could n't kill me in a year. Why, he never even shut his fist."

He wiped the blood from his fingers by rubbing them on the smooth earth of the floor and sat up.

"Why," he said, "take his gun away and I would n't say but what I 'd hammer him myself. Him kill me

—why, down in Capetown once I had a feller go for me with a bottle an' leave me for dead, an' I was havin' a drink ten minutes after he 'd gone. He is n't coming back yet, is he?"

"No—not for an hour."

She had hardly heard him, so desperately was she concentrated on the one idea that occupied her mind.

"Well, I won't wait for him," said Mr. Bailey. "I 'll get some of this muck off my face an'—an' have a drink, if you 'll be so kind, and then I 'll fade. But if ever I see him again—"

"Bailey," said Mrs. du Preez, "where 'll you go?"

"Where? Well, to-night I reckon to sleep in plain air, as the French say—or is it the Germans?—somewhere about here till I can get word with a certain nigger who owes me money. And then, off to the station on my tootsies and take train back to the land of ticky (threepenny) beer and Y. M. C. A.'s."

"England?" asked Mrs. du Preez.

"England be—" Boy Bailey hesitated—"mucked," he substituted. "Capetown, me dear; the metropolis of our foster motherland. It 's Capetown for me, where the Christian Kafirs come from."

"Bailey," said Mrs. du Preez. "Bailey, take me."

"What?" demanded Boy Bailey. "Take you where?"

"Take me with you." She was still kneeling beside him and she put a hand on his arm urgently, looking into his blood-stained and smashed face. "I won't stay with him now. I said I would n't and I won't. I 'd die first. And you and me was always good pals, Bailey. Only for that breakdown at Fereira, we 'd

have—we might have hitched up together. You were always hinting—you know you were, Bailey. Don't you know?"

"Hinting?" He was surprised at last, but still wary. "But I was n't hinting at—supporting you?"

"I did n't say you were," she answered eagerly. "Bailey, I 'm not a fool; I 've got temperament too. You said yourself I had, only the other day. And—and I can't stop with him now."

Mr. Bailey looked at his fingers thoughtfully and felt his face again.

"Fact is," he said deliberately, "you 're off your balance. You 'll live to thank me for not taking advantage of it. You 'll say, 'Bailey had me and let me go, as a gentleman would. He remembered I was a mother. Bless him.' That 's what you 'll say when you 're an old woman with your grandchildren at your knee. And anyhow, what d' you think you 'd do in Capetown? You ain't far off forty, are you?"

She shook him by the arm she held to fix his attention.

"Bailey," she said. "That don't matter for a time. I 've got a bit of money, you know. I 'm not leaving that behind."

"Money, have you?"

The wonderful thing in women such as Mrs. du Preez is that they see so clearly and yet act so blindly. They know they are sacrificed for men's gain and do not conceal their knowledge. They count upon baseness, cruelty and falsity as characteristics of men in general and play upon these qualities for their purposes. But furnish them with a reason for depending upon a man, and they will trust him, uphold him, obey him, lean

upon him and compensate the flimsiest rascal for the world's contempt and hardness by yielding him a willing victim.

They looked at each other. Bailey still sitting on the floor, she on her knees, and each read in the other's eyes an appraisement and a stratagem. The coffee-pot that stood all day beside the fire to be ready for Boer visitors, sibilated mildly at their backs.

"It would n't last for ever, the bit you 've got," said Bailey. "There 's that to think of."

"It 's a good bit," she replied.

"Is it—is it as much as fifty pounds?" he asked.

"It 's more," she answered. "Never you mind how much it is, Bailey. It 's a good bit and it 's mine, not his."

He thought upon it with his under-lip caught up between his teeth, almost visibly reviewing the possibilities of profit in the company of a woman who had money about her. Mrs. du Preez continued to urge him in hard whispers.

"I 'd never manage it by myself, Bailey, or I would n't be begging you like this. I 've tried to bring myself to it again and again, but I was n't game enough. And it is n't as if I was goin' to be a burden to you. It won't be long before I 'll get a job—you 'll see. A barmaid, p'r'aps, or I might even get in again with a show. I have n't lost my figure, anyhow. And as for staying here now, with him, after this—Bailey, I 'll take poison if you leave me."

Boy Bailey frowned and looked up at the clock which swung a pendulum to and fro against the wall, as though to invite human affairs to conduct themselves in measure.

"Well, we have n't got too much time to talk about it," he said. "He said an hour. Now supposin' I take you, you know it 's a case of footin' it down the line to the next siding? It would n't suit me to be nabbed with you on my hands. He 'd shoot as soon as think about it, and then where would I be?"

"I can walk," Mrs. du Preez assured him eagerly. "You 'll take me with you, then, Bailey?"

Boy Bailey sighed. "Oh, I 'll take you," he said. "I 'll take you, since your mind 's made up. My good nature has been the ruin of me—that and my temperament. But don't forget later on that I warned you."

Mrs. du Preez jumped up. "I won't forget," she promised. "This is my funeral. Get up from there, Bailey, and we 'll have a drink on it."

They made their last arrangements over the glasses. Christian's absence was to be counted upon for the greater part of the next day; their road would be clear.

The first word above a whisper which had been spoken since Christian left them was by Mrs. du Preez. She sat down her glass at the last with a jolt.

"But, Bailey," she cried, on a note of hysterical gaiety, "Bailey—we got to be careful, I know, and all that—but what a lark it 'll be."

He stared at her, not quick enough to keep up with her mounting mood. She was flushed and feverish with excitement and the reaction of strong feeling and her eyes danced like a child's on the brink of mischief.

"The woman 's a fool," thought Boy Bailey.

His own attitude towards the affair, as he reviewed it that night in the forage-shed, where he reposed full dressed in the scent of dry grasses and stared reflectively through a gap in the roof at the immortal patience of

the stars, was strictly businesslike. Not even a desire to be revenged upon Christian du Preez, who had called him names and beaten him, impaired the consistency of that attitude. Boy Bailey allowed for a certain proportion of thrashings in his experiences; they ranked in the balance-sheet of his transactions as a sort of office expenses. They had to be kept down to the lowest figure compatible with convenience and good business, but they were not to be weighed against a lucky deal. The one thing that engaged his fancy was the fact that the woman, though close on forty, would come with money about her—more than fifty pounds. It would make up his equipment to a handsome, an imposing, figure. Never before had he possessed a round hundred pounds in one sum. The mere possibilities that it opened out were exciting; it seemed as large and as inexhaustible as any other large sum. He did not dwell on the fact that it belonged to Mrs. du Preez and not to him; he did not even give his mind to a scheme for securing it. All that was detail, a thing to be settled at any advantageous moment. A dodge, a minute of drowsiness on her part—or perhaps, at most, a blow on the breasts—would secure the conveyance of the money to him. In the visions of Capetown that hovered on the outskirts of his thought, a ghostly seraglio attending his nod, there moved many figures, but Mrs. du Preez was not among them. His imagination made a circuit about her and her fate, or at most it glanced with brevity and distaste on the spectacle of a penniless woman weeping on a bench at a wayside station, seeing the tail-lights of a vanishing train blurred through tears.

"I knew I 'd strike it lucky one of these days," was

Mr. Bailey's reflection, as he composed himself to slumber. "With two or three more like her—I 'll be a millionaire yet."

The stars watched his upturned face as he slept with a still scrutiny that must have detected aught in its unconscious frankness that could redeem it or suggest that once it had possessed the image of God. He slept as peacefully, as devotedly, as a baby, confiding his defenselessness to the night with no tremors or uncertainty. He left unguarded the revelations of his loose and feeble face that the mild stars searched, always with their stare of stagnant surprise.

In the farmhouse, there was yet a light in the windows when dawn paled the eastward heaven. Christian du Preez slept in his bed unquietly, with clenched hands outstretched over the empty place beside him, and in another room Paul had transferred himself from waking dreams to a dream-world. Tiptoeing here and there in the house, Mrs. du Preez had gathered together the meager handful of gear that was to go with her; she had shaken out a skirt that she treasured and made ready a hat that smelt of camphor. Her money, in sovereigns, made a hard and heavy knob in a knotted napkin. All was gathered and ready for the journey and yet the light shone in the window of the parlor where she sat through the hours. Her hands were in her lap and there were no tears in her eyes—it was beyond tears. She was taking leave of her furniture.

She saw her husband at breakfast, facing him across the table with a preoccupied expression that he took for sullenness. She did not see the grimness of his countenance nor mark his eye upon her; she was thinking in soreness of heart of six rosewood chairs, up-

holstered in velvet, a rosewood table, a sofa, and the rest of it—the profit of her marriage, her sheet-anchor and her prop. She felt as though she had given her life for them.

Christian rode away with his back to the sun, with no word spoken between them, and as his pony broke into a lope—the Boer half-trot, half-canter,—he caught and subdued an impulse to look back at the house. Even if he had looked, he would hardly have seen the cautious reconnoiter of Boy Bailey's head around the corner of it, as that camp-follower of fortune made sure of his departure. Thrashings Mr. Bailey could make light of, but the Boer's threat of shooting had stuck in his mind. He rested on his hands and knees and stuck his chin close to the ground in prudent care as he peered about the corner of the house to see the owner of the rifle make a safe offing.

Even when the Boer had dwindled from sight, swallowed up by the invisible inequalities of the ground that seemed as flat as a table, he avoided to show himself in the open. He lurked under the walls of kraals, frightening farm Kafirs who came upon him suddenly and finally made a sudden appearance before Paul at the back of the house.

"I won't waste words on you," he said to the boy. "I 've got something better to do, thank God. But I 'm told you have a message for me."

"Two messages," said Paul.

"One 'll do," replied Boy Bailey. "I don't want to hear you talking. I 've been insulted here and I 'm not done with you yet. Mind that. So hand over what you 've got for me and be done with it—d' you hear?"

"Here it is." Paul put his hand into the loose bosom

of his shirt and drew out a small paper packet. He held it out to Boy Bailey.

"That!" Boy Bailey trembled as he seized it, with a frightful sense of disappointment. He had seen the money as gold, a brimming double handful of minted gold, with gold's comforting substance and weight. The packet he took into his hand was no fatter than a fat letter and held no coin.

He rent the covering apart and stared doubtfully at the little wad of notes it contained, sober-colored paper money of the Bank of Africa. It had never occurred to him that the Kafir, Kamis, would have his riches in so uninspiring a shape. Two notes of twenty pounds each and one of ten and all three of them creased and dirty. No chink, no weight to drag at his pocket and keep him in mind of it, none of the pomp and panoply of riches.

"Why—why," he stammered. "I told him—cash down. Damn the dirty Kafir swindler, what does he call this?"

"Blackmail, I think he said," replied Paul. "That was the other message. If you don't do what you said you 'd do, you 'll go to *tronk* (jail) for it, and I am to be a witness. That 's if he does n't kill you himself—like I told him he 'd better do."

Boy Bailey arrived by degrees at sufficient composure to pocket the notes, thrusting them deep for greater security and patting them through the cloth.

"Oh, you told him that, did you?" he said. "And you call yourself a white man, do you? Murder, is it? You look out, young feller. You don't know the risks you 're running. I 'm not a man that forgets."

But Paul was not daunted. He watched the battered face that threatened him with an expression which the

other did not understand. There was a curious warm interest in it that might have flattered a man less bare of illusions as to his appearance.

"I suppose you 've never seen a black eye before, you gaping moon-calf," he cried irritably. "What are you staring like that for?"

Paul smiled. "I would give you a shilling again to let me make a model of you," he answered. "I 'd give you two shillings."

Boy Bailey swore viciously and swung on his heel. He was stung at last and he had no answer. He made haste to get around the corner and away from eyes that would keep the memory of him as he appeared to Paul.

It was more than an hour later that Mrs. du Preez discovered him, squatting under the spikes of a dusty aloe, humped like a brooding vulture and grieving over that last affront. He lifted mournful eyes to her as she stood before him.

"Bailey," she said breathlessly. "I hunted everywhere for you. I thought you 'd gone without me."

She was ready for the long flight on foot. All that she had in the way of best clothes was on her body, everything she could not bring herself to leave. The seemliness of Sunday was embodied in her cloth coat and skirt, her cream silk bosom and its brooches, the architectural elaborateness of her hat. She stood in the merciless sun in all her finery, with sweat on her forehead and a small bundle in each hand.

"You 're coming, then?" he asked stupidly.

She stamped her foot impatiently. "Of course I 'm coming," she said. "Don't go into all that again, Bailey. D' you think I 'd stop with him *now*, after—after everything?"

She was holding desperately to her resolution, eager to be off before the six rosewood chairs, the table and the sofa should overcome her and make good their claim to her.

"What 's those?" Bailey nodded at the bundles torpidly.

"Oh," she was burning to be moving, to be committed, to see her boats flaming and smoking behind her. "This is grub, Bailey. We 'll want grub, won't we? And this is my things."

"The—er—money, I suppose, an' all that?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, do come on, Bailey. The money 's all here. Everything 's here. You carry the grub an' let 's be going."

"The grub, eh?" Mr. Bailey rose grunting to his feet. "You 'd rather—well, all right."

None viewed that elopement to mark how Mrs. du Preez slipped her free hand under Bailey's arm and went forth at his side in the bravery she had donned as though to bring grace to the occasion. Paul was down at the dam with sheep, and before he returned the brown distances of the Karoo had enveloped them and its levels had risen behind them to blot out the dishonored roof of the house.

At the hour of the midday meal, Paul ate alone, contentedly and unperturbed by his mother's absence. For all he knew she had one of her weeping fits upstairs in her bedroom, and he was careful to make no noise.

CHAPTER XII

MARGARET entered the drawing-room rather late for tea and Mrs. Jakes accordingly acknowledged her arrival with an extra stoniness of regard. In his place by the window, Ford turned from his abstracted contemplation of the hot monotony without and sent her a discreet and private smile across the tea-table. Mrs. Jakes, noting it and the girl's response, tightened her mouth unpleasantly as the suspicion recurred to her that there was "something between" Mr. Ford and Miss Harding. More than once of late she had noticed that their intercourse had warmed to the stage when the common forms of expression need to be helped out by a code of sympathetic looks and gestures. She addressed the girl in her thinnest tones of extreme formality.

"I thought perhaps you were n't coming in," she said. "I 'm afraid the tea 's not very hot now."

"I 'll ring," said Mr. Samson, diligently handing a chair.

"Please don't," said Margaret, taking it. "I don't mind at all. Don't bother, anybody."

"I forget if you take sugar, Miss Harding," said Mrs. Jakes, pouring negligently from the pot. Ford grinned and turned quickly to the window again.

"No sugar, thanks," answered Margaret agreeably; "and no milk and no tea."

"No tea?" Mrs. Jakes raised her eyebrows in severe

surprise and looked up. The movement sufficed to divert the stream from the tea-pot so that it flowed abundantly on the hand which held the cup and splashed thence into the sugar basin. She sat the pot down sharply and reached for her handkerchief with a smothered ejaculation of annoyance.

"Oh, I 'm sorry," said Margaret. "But how lucky you did n't keep it hot for me. You might have been scalded, might n't you?"

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Jakes, with all the dignity she could summon while she mopped at her sleeve. "Thank you; I am not hurt."

That was the second time Margaret had turned her own guns, her own little improvised pop-guns of ineffectual enmity, back upon her; and she did not quite understand how it was done. The first time had been when she had pretended not to hear a remark Margaret had addressed to her. The girl had crossed the room and joined Dr. Jakes in his hearth-rug exile, and Mr. Samson had stared while Ford laughed silently but visibly. Mrs. Jakes had not understood the implication of it; she was only aware, reddening and resentful, that Margaret had scored in some subtle fashion.

The hatred of Mrs. Jakes was a cue to consistency of action no less plain than her love. "I like people to know their own minds," was one of her self-revelations, and she believed that worthy people, decent people, good people were those who saw their way clear under all circumstances of friendship and hostility and were prepared to strike and maintain a due attitude upon any encounter. Her friends were those who indulged her with the forms of courtesy and consideration; her ene-

mies those who opposed her or were rude to her. To her friends she returned their indulgence in kind; her enemies she pursued at each meeting and behind their backs with an implacable tenacity of hate. One conceives that in the case of such lives as hers, only those survive whose feebleness is supplemented by claws. Take away their genuine capacity for making themselves disagreeable at will, and they would be trodden under and extinguished. Mrs. Jakes' girlhood was illuminated by the example of an aunt, who lived for fourteen years with only a thin wall between her and a person with whom she was not on speaking terms. The aunt had known her own mind with such a blinding clearness that she was able to sit with folded hands, listening through the wall to the sounds of a raving husband murdering her enemy, and no impulse to cry for help had arisen to dim the crystal of that knowledge. "She was a bad one at forgiving, was your Aunt Mercy," Mrs. Jakes had been told, always with a suggestion in the speaker's voice that there was something admirable in such inflexibility. Primitive passions, the lusts of skin-clad ancestors, fortified the anemia of the life from which she was sprung. Marriage by capture would have shocked her deeply, but she would not have been the worse squaw.

She dropped into a desultory conversation with Mr. Samson, with occasional side-references to Dr. Jakes, and managed at the same time to keep an eye on the other two. Margaret had walked across to Ford, and was sitting at his side on the window-ledge; he had a three-days-old copy of the *Dopfontein Courant,* in which the scanty news of the district was printed in English and Dutch and they were looking it over together. Ford

held the paper and Margaret leaned against his arm to share it; the intimacy of their attitude was disagreeable to Mrs. Jakes. An alliance between the two of them would be altogether too strong for her, and besides, it was warfare as she understood it to destroy the foe's supports whenever possible.

"Nothing in the rag, I suppose, Ford?" asked Mr. Samson, in his high, intolerant voice.

"Not a thing," answered Ford, "unless you 're interested in the price of wools."

"Grease wool per pound," suggested Margaret. "Guess how much that is, Mr. Samson."

"It ought to be cheap," said Mr. Samson. "It sounds beastly."

"Well, then, how 's this?" Margaret craned across Ford's shoulder and read: " 'Mr. Ben Bongers of Tomtown, the well-known billiard-marker, underwent last week the sad experience of being kicked at the hands of Mr. Jacobus Van Dam's *quaai* cock. Legal proceedings are pending.' There now. But does anybody know what kicked him?"

"Cock ostrich," rumbled Dr. Jakes from the back of the room. "*Quaai*—that means bad-tempered."

"You see," said Ford, "ostriches are common hereabouts. They say cock and ostrich is understood. What would they call a barn-door cock, though?"

"A poultry," said Mr. Samson. "But we must watch for those legal proceedings; they ought to be good."

Mrs. Jakes had listened in silence, but now an idea occurred to her.

"There 's nothing about that woman in Capetown this week?" she asked, and smiled meaningly as she caught Margaret's eye.

"No," said Ford. "I was looking for that, but there 's nothing."

"What woman was that?" inquired Margaret.

"Oh, a rotten business. A woman married a Kafir parson—a white woman. There 's been a bit of a row about it."

"Oh," said Margaret, understanding Mrs. Jakes' smile. "I did n't see the paper last week."

She looked at Mrs. Jakes with interest. Evidently the little woman saw the matter of Kamis, and Margaret's familiar acquaintance with him, as a secret with which she could be cowed, a piece of dark knowledge that would be held against her as a weapon of final resort. The fact did more than all Kamis' warnings and Boy Bailey's threats to enlighten her as to the African view of a white woman who had relations, any relations but those of employer and servant, with a black man. Not only would a woman in such a case expose herself to the brutal scandal that flourishes in the atmosphere of bars where Boy Baileys frame the conventions that society endorses, but she would be damned in the eyes of all the Mrs. Jakes in the country. They would tar and feather her with their contumely and bury her beneath their disgust.

She returned Mrs. Jakes' smile till that lady looked away with a long-drawn sniff of defiance.

"But why a row?" asked Margaret. "If she was satisfied, what was there to make a row about?"

She really wanted to hear what two sane and average men would adduce in support of Mrs. Jakes' views.

Old Mr. Samson shook his head rebukingly.

"Men and women ain't on their own in this world," he said seriously. "They 've got to think of the rest of

the crowd. We 're all in the same boat out here—white people holdin' up the credit of the race. Can't afford to have deserters goin' over to the other camp, don't y' know. Even supposin'—I say, *supposin'*—there was nothing else to prevent a white girl from taking on a nigger, it 's lowerin' the flag—what?"

"A woman like that deserves to be horsewhipped," cried Mrs. Jakes, with sudden vigor. "To go and marry a *Kafir*—the vile creature."

"This is very interesting," said Margaret. "Do you mean the Kafir is vile, Mrs. Jakes, or the woman?"

"I mean both," retorted Mrs. Jakes. "In this country we know what such creatures are. A respectable woman does n't let a Kafir come near her if she can help it. She never speaks to them except to give them their orders. And as to—to marrying them, or being friendly with them—why, she 'd sooner die."

Margaret had started a subject which no South African can exhaust. They discuss it with heat, with philosophic impartiality, with ethnological and eugenic inexactitudes, and sometimes with bloodshed; but they never wear it out.

"You see, Miss Harding, there are other reasons against it," Mr. Samson struck in again. "There 's the general feelin' on the subject and you can't ignore that. One woman must n't do what a million other women feel to be vile. It 's makin' an attack on decency—that 's what it comes to. A woman might feel a call in the spirit to marry a monkey. It might suit her all right—might be the best thing she could do, so far as a woman of that sort was concerned; but it would n't be playin' the game. It would n't be cricket."

He shook his spirited white head with a frown.

"I see," said Margaret. "But there 's one other point. I only want to know, you know."

"Naturally," agreed Mr. Samson. "What 's the point?"

"Well, there are about ten times as many black people as white in this country. What about their sense of decency? Does n't that suffer a little by this—this trades-union of the whites? That woman in Capetown has all the whites against her and all the blacks for her —I suppose. There 's a majority in her favor, at any rate."

"Hold on," cried Mr. Samson. "You can't count the Kafirs like that, you know. They 're not in it. We 're talking about white people. The whole point is that Kafirs *are n't* whites. A white woman belongs to her own people and must stand by their way of lookin' at things. If we take Kafir opinion, we 'll be chuckin' clothes next and goin' in for polygamy."

"Would we?" said Margaret. "I wonder. D' you think it will come to that when the Kafirs are all as civilized as we are and the color line is gone?"

"The color line will never go," replied Mr. Samson, solemnly. "You might as well talk of breakin' down the line between men and beasts."

"Well, evolution did break it down," said Margaret. "Think, Mr. Samson. There will come a day when we shall travel on flying machines, and all have lungs like drums. We shall live in cities of glazed brick beside running streams of disinfectant. There will be no poverty and no crime and no dirt, and only one language. Where will the Kafirs be then? Still in huts on the Karoo being kept in their place?"

"I 'm not a prophet," said Mr. Samson. "I don't

know where they 'll be. It won't bother me when that time comes. I 'll be learning the harp."

"There 'll be a statue in one of those glazed-brick cities to the woman in Capetown," Margaret went on. "It 'll be inscribed in letters of gold—'To——(whatever her name was): She felt the future in her bones.' "

Mr. Samson blew noisily. "Evolution 's not in my line," he said. "It 's all very well to drag in Darwin and all that but black and white don't mix and you can't get away from that."

"I should think not, indeed." Mrs. Jakes corroborated him with a shrug. She had found herself intrigued by the glazed-brick cities, and shook them from her as she remembered that she was not "friends" with their inventor.

But Margaret was keen on her theory and would not abandon it for a fly-blown aphorism.

"You 'd never have been satisfied with that woman," she said. "Supposing she had n't married the Kafir? Supposing that being fond of him and believing in him, she had bowed down to your terrible decency and not married? You 'd still have been down on her for liking him, and she 'd have been persecuted if she spoke to him or let him be friendly with her. Is n't that so?"

Mr. Samson pursed his lips and bristled his white mustache up under his nose.

"Yes," he said. "That is so. I won't pretend I 've got any use for women who go in for Kafirs."

"Nobody has." Mrs. Jakes came in again at the tail of his reply with all the confidence of a faithful interpreter.

Margaret, marking her righteous severity, had an impulse to stun them both with a full confession. She

found in herself an increasing capacity for being irritated by Mrs. Jakes, and had a vision of her, flattened beyond recovery, by the revelation. She repressed the impulse because the vision went on to give her a glimpse of the tragedy that would close the matter.

Ford had not yet spoken. He sat beside her, listening. Across the room, Dr. Jakes was listening also. She put the question to him.

"What do you think, Dr. Jakes?" she asked.

"Eh?" He started at the sound of his name and put up an uncertain hand to straighten his spectacles.

"About all this—about the general principle of it?" she particularized.

"Oh, well." He hesitated and cleared his throat. There was a fine clear-cut idea floating somewhere in his mind, but he could not bring it into focus with his thoughts.

"It 's simply that—Kafirs are Kafirs," he said dully. Mrs. Jakes interposed a warm, "Certainly," and further disordered him. He gave her a long and gloomy look and tried to go on. "When they are—further advanced, that will be the time to—to think about intermarriage, and all that. Now—well, you can see what they are."

He wiped his forehead nervously with his handkerchief, and Ford entered the conversation.

"Jakes has got it," he said. "Intermarriage may come—perhaps; but at present every marriage of a white person with a Kafir means a loss. It 's a sacrifice of a civilized unit. D' you see, Miss Harding? You 've got to reckon not only what that woman in Capetown does but what she does n't do as well. She might have been the mother of men and women. Well, now she 'll

bear children to be outcasts. She ought to have waited a couple of hundred years."

"Perhaps she was in a hurry," answered Margaret. "But there 's the other question—what if she had n't married?"

"Oh," said Ford. "In point of reason and all that, she 'd have been right enough. But people are n't reasonable. Look at Samson—and look at me."

"You mean—you 've 'no use' for her?"

"It 's prejudice," he answered. "It 's anything you like. But the plain fact is, I 'd probably admire such a woman if I met her in a book; but as flesh and blood, I decline the introduction. Does that shock you?"

"Margaret smiled rather wryly. "Yes," she said. "It does, rather."

He turned towards her, humorous and whimsical, but at that moment Dr. Jakes made a movement doorward and Mrs. Jakes began her usual brisk fire of small-talk to cover his retreat.

"I only wish there was some way we could get the papers regularly—such a lot of things seem to be happening just now," she prattled. "Some of the papers have cables from England and they are most interesting. That *Cape Times* you lent me, Mr. Samson—it had the names of the people at the Drawing-Room. Do you know, I 've often been to see the carriages drive up, and it 's just like reading about old friends. There was one old lady, rather fat, with a mole on her chin, who always went, and once we saw her drinking out of a flask in the carriage. My cousin William—William Penfold—nicknamed her the Duchess de Grundy, and when we asked a policeman about her, it turned out she really was a Duchess. Was n't that strange?"

Mr. Samson heard this recital with unusual attention.

"A flask?" he asked. "Leather-covered thing, big as a quart bottle? Fat old girl with an iron-gray mustache?"

"Why," cried Mrs. Jakes. "You 've seen her too."

Mr. Samson glared around him. "Seen her," he exclaimed. "Why, ma 'am, once—she would walk with the guns, confound her—once I put a charge of shot into her. And why I did n't give her the other barrel while I was about it, I 've never been able to imagine. Seen her, indeed. I 've seen her bounce like a bally india-rubber ball with a gunful of lead to help her along. Used to write to me, she did, whenever a pellet came to the surface and dropped out. I should just think I had seen her."

"Fancy," said Mrs. Jakes.

Mr. Samson did not go off forthwith, as his wont was. He showed a certain dexterity in contriving to keep Margaret in the room with himself till the others had gone. Then he closed the door and stood against it, smiling paternally but still with gallantry.

"I wanted just a word with you, if you 'll allow me," he said, with a hand to the point of his trim mustache. He was a beautifully complete thing as he stood with his back to the door, groomed to a hair, civilized to the eyebrows. He presented a perfected type of the utterly conventionalized, kindly and uncharitable gentleman of England.

"Oh, Mr. Samson, this is so sudden," said Margaret.

"What's that? Oh, you be—ashamed of yourself," he answered. "Tryin' to fascinate an old buffer like me.

But, I say, Miss Harding, I wish you 'd just let me say something I 've got on my mind—and forgive beforehand anything that sounds like preaching. We old crocks—we 've got nothing to do but worry the youngsters, and we have to be indulged—what?"

"Go ahead," agreed Margaret. "But if you preach at me, after shooting a duchess,—I'll scream for help. What is it?"

"It 's a small matter," said Mr. Samson. "I want you just to let us go on likin' and admirin' you, without afterthought or anything to spoil the effect. You're new out here, and of course you don't know and could n't know; you 're too fresh and too full of sweetness and innocence; but—well, it kind of jars to hear you standin' up for a woman like that woman in Capetown. You mean a lot to us, Miss Harding. We have n't got much here, you know; we had to leave what we had and run out here for our lives—run like bally rabbits when a terrier comes along. It 'ud be a kindness if you would n't—you know."

There was no mistaking the kindliness with which he smiled at her as he spoke. It was another warning, but conveyed differently from the others she had received. Mr. Samson managed to make his air of pleading for a matter of sentiment convincing.

"You—you 're awfully kind," she said.

"Not kind," he replied. "Oh no; it is n't that. It 's what I said. It 's us I 'm thinking of. You 've no idea of what you stand for. You 're home, and afternoons when one meets pretty girls who are all goin' to marry some bally cub, and restaurants full of nice women with jolly shoulders, and fields with tailor-made girls runnin' away from cows. You 're the whole show. But if you

start educatin' us, though we 're an ignorant lot, we lose all that."

He looked at her with a trace of anxiety.

"It 's cheek, I know, puttin' it to you like this," he added. "But I 'm relyin' on your being a sportsman, Miss Harding."

"It is n't cheek," Margaret answered. "It 's awfully good of you. I—I see what you mean, and I should be sorry if I—well, failed you."

He stood aside from the door at once, throwing it open as he did so.

"Sportsman to the bone," he said. "Bless your heart, did n't I know it. Though I could n't have blamed you if you 'd kicked at all this pow-wow from a venerable ruin old enough to be your grandfather."

Hand to mustache, crooked elbow cocked well up, brows down over bold eyes, the venerable ruin challenged the title he gave himself. Margaret found his simple and comely tricks of posture and expression touching; he played his little game of pose so harmlessly and faithfully. She stopped in front of him as she walked to the door.

"If you 'll shut your eyes and keep quite still, I 'll give you something," she offered.

"Ha!" snorted Mr. Samson zestfully.

He closed his eyes and stood to attention, smiling. The lids of his eyes were flattened and seamed with blue veins, and they gave him, as he waited unmoving, some of the unreality and remoteness of a corpse. He looked like a man who had died suddenly while proposing a loyal toast or paying a compliment, who carries his genial purpose with him into the dark and leaves only the shell of it behind.

Margaret put a light hand on his trim gray shoulder and rising on tiptoe touched him with her lips between the eyes. Then she turned and went out, unhurrying, and Mr. Samson still stood to attention with closed eyes till the sound of her feet was clear of the stone-flagged hall and had passed out to the stoep.

She did not go at once to the spot where a square stone pillar screened Ford's easel, as her custom was. She came to rest at the side of the steps and stood thoughtfully looking out to the veld, where the brown showed hints of gold as the sun went westward. It hung now, very great and blinding, above the brim of the earth, and bathed her with steep rays that riddled the recesses of the stoep with their radiant artillery. To one hand, a road came from the horizon and passed to the opposite horizon on the other hand, linking unseen and unheard-of stopping-places across the gulf of that emptiness.

"What has all this got to do with me?" was her thought, as her eyes traveled over the flat and unprofitable breast of land, whose featurelessness seemed to defy her even to fasten it in her memory. She recollected Ford's saying that she was a bird of passage, with all this but a stage in her flight from sickness to health. Her starting and halting points were far from Karoo; she touched it only as the dust that moves upon it when a chance wind raises fantastic spirals and drives them swaying and zigzagging till they break and are gone. Nothing that she did could be permanent here; her pains would be spent in vain. Even the martyrdom that had been held up to her for a warning—even that, if she accepted it, would be ineffectual, the "sacrifice of a civilized unit."

Along the stoep, Ford's leg protruded from behind the

pillar as he sat widely asprawl on his camp-stool; the heel of the white canvas shoe was on the flags and the toe cocked up energetically. He found things simple enough, reflected Margaret; as simple as Mrs. Jakes found them. Where knowledge and reason failed him, he availed himself frankly of prejudices and dealt honestly with his instincts. He permitted himself the indulgence of plain dislikings and was not concerned to justify or excuse them. It was possible to conceive him wrong, irrational, perverse, but never inconsistent or embarrassed. In the drawing-room he had spoken lightly, but Margaret knew the steadfastness of mind that was behind the trivial manner of speech. Well, he would have to be told, sooner or later, of the secret she shared with the veld. That confession was pressing itself upon her. With Mrs. Jakes and Boy Bailey already privy to it, it could not be withheld much longer. She stood, gazing at the outstretched leg, and tried to foresee his reception of the news.

"Well," said Ford, looking up absently when presently she walked down to him. "Did Samson crush you or did you crush him?"

"It was a draw," answered Margaret. "He 's a dear old thing, though. And what a guarantee of good faith to be able to cap a duchess story like that. Was n't it good?"

"Rotten shooting, though," said Ford. "He would n't have admitted he 'd peppered a commoner."

"You 're jealous," retorted Margaret. "Mr. Samson 's quite all right, and I won't have him sneered at after he 's been paying me compliments."

"Once I hit an Honorable with a tennis racket. It slipped out of my hand just as I was taking a fearful

smack at a high one and hit him like a boomerang. So I 'm not as jealous as you might think."

"One can't throw a tennis racket without hitting an Honorable nowadays. That 's nothing," said Margaret. "And you 're just an ordinary person, anyhow. Mr. Samson, now—he 's not only a gentleman, but he looks like it and sounds like it, and you could tell him with a telescope twenty miles off for the real thing."

"Ye–es." Ford drew a leisurely thumb across the foreground of his picture and surveyed the result with his head on one side. "You know," he went on, kneading reflectively at the sticky masses of paint, "some of that 's true. He does sound exactly like it. If you wanted to know the broad general view of the class that he represents, and all the other classes that take a pattern from it, you 'd be fairly safe in asking Samson. Those dashing men of the world, you know—they 're all for the domestic virtues and loyalty and fair play. If you find fault with gambling and drinking and cursing, they say you 've got the Nonconformist Conscience. But when they stand for a principle, they 've got the consciences of Sunday School pupil-teachers. Samson's ideal of England is a nation of virtuous women and honest men, large families, Sunday observance, and no damned French kickshaws. For that, he 'd go to the stake smiling."

"Well," said Margaret, "why not?"

"Oh, I 'm not saying anything against him," answered Ford. "I 'm telling you what he stands for and how far he counts when he turns on the oracle."

"You mean that Kafir business, of course?"

"Yes," said Ford. "That 's what I mean."

"I gathered," said Margaret slowly, "that you agreed with him about that."

He was still at work with his colors and did not raise his head as he answered.

"Not a bit of it. I don't agree with him at all. He talks absolute drivel as soon as he begins to argue."

"But," began Margaret.

"I say I don't agree with him," continued Ford; "but that 's not to say I don't feel just the same. As a matter of fact I do."

"Oh, you 're too subtle," said Margaret impatiently.

"That 's not subtle," said Ford imperturbably. "You were sounding us all inside there and you got eloquence from old Samson and a shot in the dark from Jakes and thunder and lightning from Mrs. Jakes. Now, if you listen, you 'll get the real thing from me. As you said, I 'm just an ordinary person. Well, the ordinary person knows all right that a matter of tar-brush in the complexion does n't make such a mighty difference in two human beings. He sees they 're both bustling along to be dead and done with it as soon as possible, and that they 'll turn into just the same kind of earth and take their chance of the same immortality or annihilation—as the case may be. He sees all right; he even sees a sort of romance and beauty in it, and makes it welcome when it does n't suggest the real thing too clearly. But all that does n't prevent him from barring niggers utterly in his own concerns. It does n't stop his flesh from creeping when he reads of the woman in Capetown, and imagines her sitting on the Kafir's knee. And it does n't hinder him from looking the other way when he meets her in the street. It is n't reason, I know. It is n't

sense. It is n't human charity. But it is a thing that 's rooted in him like his natural cowardice and his bodily appetites. Is that at all clear?"

Margaret did not answer at once. She seemed to be looking at the canvas.

"Yes," she said finally. "It 's clear enough. But tell me—is that you? I mean, were you describing your own feelings about it?"

"Yes," he said.

"You and I are going to quarrel before long," Margaret answered. "We 'll have to. You won't be able to help yourself."

"Oh," said Ford. "Why 's that?"

"Because you 're such an ordinary person," retorted Margaret.

He lifted his head at the tone of her voice, but further talk was arrested by the sight of a man on horseback coming across from the road towards them. Both recognized Christian du Preez. They saw him at the moment that he switched his cantering pony round towards the house, and came swiftly over the grass. He had his rifle slung upon his back by a sling across the chest, and he reined up short immediately below them, so that he remained with his face just above the rail of the stoep.

"*Daag,*" he said awkwardly.

"Afternoon," replied Ford. "Are you painted for war, or what, with that gun of yours?"

The Boer, checking his fretting pony with heel and hand, gave him a bewildered look. The dust was thick in his beard, as from long traveling, and lay in damp streaks in each furrow of his thin face. The faint, acrid smell of sweating man and horse lingered about him. He moistened his lips before he could speak further.

"My wife is gone out," he said, speaking as though he restrained many eager words. "I must speak to her at once. She is not here—not?"

"I don't think so," said Ford.

Margaret was more certain. "Mrs. du Preez has n't been here this afternoon," she assured the Boer. "There 's nothing wrong, I hope."

Christian looked from one to the other as they answered with quick nervous eyes.

"No," he said. "But it is something—I must speak to her. She is not here, then?"

They answered him again, wondering somewhat at his strangeness. He tried to smile at them but bit his lip instead.

"Well—" he hesitated.

"I will fetch Mrs. Jakes if you like," said Margaret. "But I 'm quite sure Mrs. du Preez has n't been here."

"No," he said forlornly. "Thank you. Good-by, Miss Harding."

The pony leaped under the spur, and they saw him gallop back to the road and across it towards the farm.

"Queer," said Ford. "Did you notice how humble he was while his eyes looked like murder?"

But Margaret had been struck by something else.

"I thought he looked like Mrs. Jakes," she said, "when I answer her back."

CHAPTER XIII

IT was Kamis, the Kafir, ranging upon one of his solitary quests, who came upon them in the late afternoon, arriving unseen out of the heat-haze and appearing before them as incomprehensibly as though he had risen out of the ground.

Mrs. du Preez had groaned and sat down for the fourth or fifth time in three miles and Mr. Bailey's patience was running dry. For himself, the trudge through the oppression of the sun was not a new experience; he was inured to its discomforts and pains by many years of use while he had been a pilgrim from door to distant door of the charitable and credulous, and he had gathered a certain adeptness in the arts of the trek. He had set a good lively pace for this journey, partly because a single vigorous stage would see them at the railway line, but also because he sincerely believed in Christian du Preez's willingness to shoot him, and was concerned to be beyond the range of that vengeance. Therefore, at this halt, he turned and swore.

Mrs. du Preez fanned herself feebly with one hand while the other still held the little bundle that contained her money.

"I can't help it, Bailey," she said painfully. "I mus' have a rest. I 'm done."

"Done." He spat. "Bet I could make you walk if I started. Are you goin' to come on?"

She shook her head slowly, with closed eyes.

"I can't," she said. "I mus' jus'—have a sit down, Bailey."

Her elaborate hat nodded drunkenly on her head, and all the dust of the long road could not make her clothes at home in the center of the wide circle of dumb and forsaken land in which she sat, surrendered to her weariness, but never relaxing her hold on her money. Not once since their setting out had she loosed her grip on that, save when she changed the burden of it from one hand to the other. Her faith was in the worth and power of that double handful of sovereigns, and she would have felt poorer on a desert island by the loss of a single one of them.

"I 've been patient with you," Boy Bailey said, looking at her fixedly. "I 've been very patient with you. But it 's about time there was an end of this two-steps-and-a-squat business. There 's no knowing what minute that husband of yours might come ridin' up with his gun."

"I 'll be—all right—soon," she said. "Give me a half hour, Bailey."

"Take your own time," he replied. "Take all the time there is. Only—I 'm goin' on."

She opened her eyes at that and blinked at him in an effort to see him through the hot mist that stood before them.

"Goin'—to leave me?"

"Yes," he said. "What d' you think?"

Her look, her parted lips and all her accusing helplessness were before his eyes; he looked past them and shuffled. To the weak man, weakness is horrible.

"I warned you about comin'," he said, seeking the support of reasonable words as such men do. "You 've

got yourself to blame, and I don't see why I should stop here to be shot by a man that grudged me a bite and a bed. It is n't as if I 'd asked you to come."

"I 'll be better soon," was all she could say, still holding him with that look of a wounded animal, the reproach that neither threatens nor defies and is beyond all answer.

"Better soon," he grumbled scornfully, and fidgeted. Her hand never left the little bundle. Would she struggle much, he was thinking. He could take it from her, of course, but he did n't want her to scream, even in that earless solitude. The thought of her screams made him uneasy. She might go on crying out even when he had torn the bundle from her and the cries would follow at his back as he carried it off, and he would know that she was still crying when he had passed out of hearing.

Still—a kick, perhaps. Boy Bailey looked at her bowed body and at the toe of his shoe. He began to breathe short and to tremble. It was necessary to wait a moment and let energy accumulate for the deed.

"Don't—go off," gasped Mrs. du Preez, with her face bent over her knees, and Bailey relaxed. The words had snapped the tension of his resolve, and it would have to be keyed up again.

"Give me that bundle," he said hoarsely. "Give it to me, or else—"

She sat up with an effort and he stopped in the middle of his threat. He was pale now and trembling strongly. She drew the bundle closer to her defensively.

"No," she answered. "I won't."

"Give it here," he croaked, from a dry throat. Come on—God! I'll—"

The moment of resolution had come to him, and for

the instant he was fit and strong enough to do murder. He plunged forward with his lower lip sucked in and his ragged teeth showing in a line above his chin, and all his loose and fearful face contorted into a maniac rage. The woman fell over sideways with a strident cry, her bundle hugged to her breast. Boy Bailey gasped and flung back his foot for the swinging kick that would save him from the noise of her complainings.

He kicked, blind to all but the woman on the ground, alone with her in a narrow theater of bestial purpose and sweating terrors. He neither heard nor saw the quick spring of the waiting Kafir, who charged him with a shoulder, football fashion, while the kick still traveled in the air and pitched him aside to fall brutally on his ear and elbow. He tumbled and slid upon the dust with the unresisting lifelessness of a sack of flour and lay, making noises in his throat and moving his head feebly, till the world grew visible again and he could see.

The Kafir stood above Mrs. du Preez, who lay where she had thrown herself, and stared up at him with eyes in which the understanding was stagnant.

"Don't be frightened," he said. "I know who you are. I 'll take you safely where you want to go."

He spoke in tones as matter-of-fact as he could make them, for his professional eye told him that the woman was at the limit of her endurance and could support no further surprises. But he took in the pretentious style of her dress with the dust upon it and the fact that she was in company with the tramp upon a path that led to the railway and wondered darkly. It was almost inconceivable, in spite of the situation in which he found her, that she could be running away from her

husband in favor of the creature who now lay in the road, moving his limbs tentatively and watching with furtive eyes to see if it was safe to sit up.

Mrs. du Preez moistened her lips. "I got nowhere to go, now," she said.

"Then you 'd better go home," said Kamis. "Rest a little first—there 's plenty of time, and it 'll be cooler presently. Then I 'll take you back."

He turned to look over his shabby tweed shoulder at Boy Bailey and addressed him curtly.

"You can go now," he said.

Boy Bailey sat up awkwardly, with an expression of pain, as though it hurt him to move. He had not yet mastered the change in the state of affairs and attempted to temporize till matters should define themselves.

"I 've got to see first if I can stand," he said. "It 's all very well, but you can't slam a man down on his funny-bone and then order him to do the goose-step."

"Hurry," said the Kafir.

Mr. Bailey passed an exploring hand about his shoulder. "Ouch!" He winced. "Broken bone," he explained. "You say you 're a doctor—see for yourself. And anyhow, I want a word in private with the lady."

Kamis took two deliberate steps in his direction and—

"Hey!" yelled Boy Bailey, and scrambled to his feet. "What d' you kick me like that for, you black swine?"

He backed before the Kafir, with spread hands in agitated protestation.

"Kickin' a man when he 's down," he cried. "Is

that a game to play? All right, *all* right; I 'm goin', are n't I? You keep where you are and let me turn round. No, you stop first. I 'm not goin' to be kicked again like that if I can help it."

Kamis came to a halt.

"Next time I see you, I 'll murder you," he promised. "Murder you." He paused at Mr. Bailey's endeavor to save his dignity with a sneer. "Don't you believe that?" he asked. "Say—don't you believe I 'll do it?"

Mr. Bailey's sneer failed as he looked into the black face that confronted him. By degrees the sheer sinister power that inhabited it, lighting it up and making it imminently terrible with its patent willingness to kill, burned its way to his slow intelligence. His pendulous underlip quivered.

"Don't you?" repeated the Kafir, with a motion of his shoulders like a shrug. "Don't you believe I 'll slaughter you like a pig next time I see you? Answer —don't you believe it?"

"Ye–es," stammered Boy Bailey.

The Kafir's deliberate nod was indescribably menacing.

"That 's right," he said. "It 's very true indeed. And you remember what I paid you fifty pounds for, too. A word about that, Bailey, and I 'll have you. Now go."

A hundred paces off, Boy Bailey halted, to get breath and ideas, and stood looking back.

He waited, watching the Kafir bring Mrs. du Preez to a condition in which she could stand again and bear the view of the backward road coiling forth to the featureless skyline, and thence to further and still featureless

skylines, traversing intolerably far vistas that gave no sign of a destination. With his returning wits, he found himself wondering what arguments the man had to induce her to brave her husband.

As it happened, there was need of none. The woman was broken and beyond thought. She was reduced to instincts. The homing sense that sets a wounded rock-rabbit of the kranzes crawling in agony to die in its burrow moved in her dimly; she could not even summon force to wonder at the apparition of the English-speaking, helpful Kafir. Under the practised deftness of his suggestion and persuasion she rose and put her limp arm in his, and they moved away together, following their long shadows that went before them, gliding upon the dust.

"There they go," said Mr. Bailey bitterly. "There they go. And what about *me?*"

He saw that the Kafir propped the exhausted woman with his arm and helped her. He was protecting and assured, a strength and a shield. Almost unconsciously Boy Bailey followed after them. He could not have given a reason for doing so; he only knew that he was very unwilling to be left alone with his bruises and his sense of failure and defeat. In less than a quarter of an hour, the veld that had been comfortingly empty had become lonely. He went on tiptoe, with long ungainly strides and much precaution to be unheard.

He followed perhaps for half a mile and then the Kafir looked back and saw him. Mr. Bailey stopped within speaking distance.

"I was coming to apologize," he called. "That 's all. I lost my temper and I want to apologize."

The Kafir let Mrs. du Preez sit down and came

walking back slowly. When half the distance to Mr. Bailey was covered he broke suddenly into a run. For some seconds Mr. Bailey abode, his mind racing, and then he too turned and ran as he had never run before. With fists clenched and head back, he faced the west and fled in leaps, and as he went he emitted small squeals and fragments of speech.

"My mistake," he would utter, through failing breath. "As long as I live, I 'll never—I swear it—I swear it. O-o-oh. You 're very—hard—on me."

The Kafir had ceased to run when Mr. Bailey turned to flee. He stood and watched him go, unpursued and terrified, with the dust spirting under his feet like the smoke of a powder-train. Then he went back and aided Mrs. du Preez to rise and together they set out again.

The last of Boy Bailey was a black blot against the sky; he was too far off for Kamis to see whether he still ran or stood. It merely testified that a degenerate human frame will stand blows and much emotion and effort under a hot sun and yet hold safe for further evil the life within it. Man of all animals is the most tenacious of his existence; he lives not for food but for appetite. What was assured was that the far blot that represented Boy Bailey was still avid and still unsatisfied. He had not even gratified his last desire to apologize.

The sun dawdled over the final splendid ceremony of his setting, drawing out the pomp of departure while night waited in the east for his going with pale premature stars. The small wind that clears the earth of the sun's leavings of heat sighed about them, and produced from each side of their path a faint rustle as

though it stirred trees at a little distance. Above them the sky began to light up with a luminous powder of stars, that strained into radiant clearness before the west was empty of its last pink stain. They went slowly, Mrs. du Preez leaning heavily on Kamis' arm, and still faithfully carrying her bundle. She had not spoken since they started. She went with her eyes on the ground, and unequal steps, till the evening breeze touched her and she lifted her face to its gentle refreshment.

She had to sit down every little while, but she was stronger after the setting of the sun, and it was not till the night had surrounded them that she spoke.

"When I saw you first," she said suddenly, "the sun was in my eyes. And I thought you was—*black?*"

"Yes?" said Kamis. "That was n't the sun," he said slowly. "I am black."

"But—" she hesitated. "I don't mean just black," she said vaguely. "I meant—a black man, a nigger."

She was peering up at him anxiously, while her weight rested in his arm.

"Well, would n't you have let a nigger help you?" asked Kamis quietly. "Is n't it a nigger's business, when he sees a white woman in trouble, to do what he can for her? One of your farm niggers, now—would n't you have called to him if he 'd been there?"

"Yes," fretfully. "But I thought *you* was a nigger."

"I 'm a doctor," said Kamis. "I was at schools and colleges in England. The English Government gives me hundreds of pounds a year. You 're quite safe with me."

"It was the sun in my eyes," she murmured uncertainly. "I said it was the sun."

"No, it was n't the sun," he said. "You saw quite well. I am a nigger."

"How can a doctor be a nigger?" she asked. "Niggers—why, I know all about niggers. You can't fool me."

"I won't try," answered Kamis. "But—one thing; you 've got to get home, have n't you? And you can't do it alone. You would n't refuse to let a nigger help you to walk, would you?"

"No," she said wonderingly. "I *got* to get home. I *got* to."

"All right," said Kamis. "Then look here. Take a good look and satisfy yourself. There 's no sun now to get in your eyes."

He had halted and drawn his arm from hers. A match crackled and its flame showed him to her, illuminating his negro features, and her drawn face, frowning in an effort to comprehend. He held it till it burned to his fingers and then dropped it, and the darkness fell between them again like a curtain.

"Now do you see?" he asked. "A Kafir like any other, flat nose, big lips, woolly hair, everything—just plain Kafir; but a doctor none the less. The Kafir will help you to walk and the doctor will see to you if you find by and by that you can't walk any further. Will that satisfy you?"

She did not answer immediately; she stood as though she were still trying to scan the face which the match flame had revealed. She was searching for a formula, he told himself with a momentary bitterness, which

would save her white-skinned dignity and yet permit her to avail herself of his services.

Then her moving hand touched him on the arm, gently and unexpectedly, and she answered.

"You poor devil," she said. "You poor devil."

Kamis stood quite still, her timid touch upon him, the ready pity of her voice in his ears. Mingled with his surprise he felt a sense of abasement in the presence of this other outcast, so much weaker than he, and he could have begged for her pardon for the wrong which his thoughts had done her.

"Thank you," he said abruptly. "Thank you, Mrs. du Preez. It 's—it 's kind of you. You shall be very safe with me."

It was a strange companionship in which they went forward through the night, he matching his slow steps to her weariness, with her thin arm, bony and rigid through the cloth sleeve, weighing within his. She was too far spent for talk; they moved in a silence of effort and desperate persistence, with only her harsh and painful breathing sounding in reply to the noises which the darkness evoked upon the veld. Every little while she had to sit down on the ground, and at each such occasion she would make her small excuse.

"I 'll have to take a spell, now," she would say apologetically. "You see, I was walking since before noon."

Then her arm would slide from his and she would sink to earth at his feet, panting painfully, with her head bowed on her bosom and her big hat roofing her over. Thus she would remain motionless for a space till her breath came more easily, and then the hat would tilt up again.

"I could move on a bit, now, if you 'd give me a hand up."

Her courage was a thing he wondered at. Again and again, as the hours spun themselves out, she rose to her feet, groped for his sustaining arm, with her face a pallid disk against the shadow of her hat, and faced the cruel miles. Her feet, in her smart town boots, tormented her without ceasing; her strength was drained from her like blood from an opened vein; and the slowness of their progress protracted the dreary horror of the road that remained to be covered. At times she seemed to talk to herself in whispers between sobbing breaths, and his ear caught hints of words shaped laboriously, but nothing that had meaning. But she uttered no complaint.

At one point where she rested rather longer than usual, he tried to find out what she expected at the journey's end.

"Have you thought what you 'll say," he asked, "when you get home?"

She raised her head slowly.

"I don't know," she answered. "I—I got to take my gruel, I suppose. Whatever it is, I got to take it. It 's up to me."

It was the sum of her wisdom; those free-lances of their sex add it early into the conclusion that saves them the futile effort of evading payment for the fruit they snatch when the world is not looking. After the fun, the adventure, the thrill, comes the gruel, and they have to take it. It is up to them. By the short cut of experience, they reach thus the end and destination of a severe morality.

"He can't shut you out, at any rate," said Kamis, half-aloud.

"Can't he?" she said. "Can't he, though! Can't stand there feelin' noble and righteous and point to the veld and shut the door with a big slam? You don't know him."

She rose again presently, clicking her tongue between her teeth at the anguish of her swollen and abraded feet.

"The Boers got sense," she said. "A person 's a fool to go on foot."

It was the only reference she made to her pain and weariness.

It was long past midnight when they came at last past the sheds behind the farmhouse and saw that there was yet a light in the kitchen. The window shone broad and yellow in the vague bulk of the house, and as they lifted their faces towards it, a shadow moved across it, grotesque and abrupt after the manner of shadows, which seem to have learned from men how to mock their makers.

"That 's Christian," said Mrs. du Preez, whispering harshly.

"Are you afraid?" asked Kamis. "Will you sit here while I go and speak to him first?"

"No," she replied. "No use. This is where I get what 's comin' to me. I wish I was n't so done up, though. If he knew, I believe p'r'aps he 'd let me off till the morning. But he does n't know, and it would n't be him if he did."

"Better let me speak to him first," urged Kamis. "I could tell him—"

"No," she said again. "No use dodging it. We 'll

go to the back door; I 'd rather have him shut that on me than the front."

Near the door she drew her arm away from the Kafir's and left him standing to one side, while she approached and knocked upon it with the back of her hand. She meant to eat the dreaded gruel alone.

Silence succeeded upon her knocking, and then deliberate footsteps within that came towards the door. A pair of bolts were thrust back, crashing in their sockets. Mrs. du Preez gathered her sparse energies and stood upright as the door opened and the figure of her husband appeared, tall and black against the light inside which leaked past him and spilt itself about her feet. For some moments they stood facing each other, and neither spoke.

There was drama in the atmosphere. The Kafir standing without its scope, watched absorbedly.

"Christian," said Mrs. du Preez, at length; "it 's me."

"Yes." The Boer's deep voice was grave. "Where have you been?"

She lifted her shoulders in a faint hopeless shrug.

"I ran away," she said. "Like I said I would. But I was n't up to it."

"You ran away," he repeated slowly. "With that Bailey?"

"Yes, Christian. But—"

Christian caught sight of the dark figure of the Kafir and started sharply.

"Is that him there?" he cried. "Is that Bailey?"

"No, no," she answered eagerly. "That 's—that 's a Kafir, Christian; he helped me to get back. He came up when I was too tired to go any further, and Bailey

was starting to kick me to get my money away from me—I 've got it here, Christian, all safe—an' he knocked Bailey over and chased him off. If it had n't ha' been for him—"

"What?" Christian interrupted strongly. "What did you say? Bailey was going to—kick you? You was too tired to walk and he was going to kick you?"

"Yes, Christian. And if it had n't ha' been for this Kafir, he would ha' done. I was sitting down, you see, and he got mad with me and wanted me to hand him over the money. So when I screamed—what did you say, Christian?"

"I swore," answered the Boer.

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. du Preez, as though she apologized for interrupting. "And then the Kafir came up. If it was n't for him, Christian, I 'd—I 'd ha' had to die out of doors. I could never have managed to get back by myself."

The effort merely to stand upright taxed her sorely, but she went on doggedly to praise the Kafir and to try in her confused and inadequate tongue to convey to the Boer that this Kafir was not as other Kafirs. Her small voice, toneless and desperate, beat on pertinaciously.

"He 's a doctor, Christian," she concluded. "He 's been educated an' all that, an' he speaks English like a gentleman. And he 's been a white man to me."

"Yes," said the Boer. His mind was stuck fast upon one point of her story. "Yes. But—you said Bailey was going to *kick* you—out there all alone by yourselves in the veld?"

It daunted him; his intelligence shrank from the

picture of that brutality unleashed under the staring skies.

"Yes, Christian," answered Mrs. du Preez submissively.

"Here—come in," he bade abruptly, and stood aside to make room for her to pass. "Come in. Come in."

It was a couple of seconds before she fully comprehended. She made a small moaning sound and began to totter. The Boer took her by the arm.

"Wait," he said curtly, over her head, to the Kafir, and led her within.

Kamis waited, leaning against the wall of the house. He had brought his task to an end and the finish had arranged itself fortunately; it had been worthy of his pains. The Boer had been startled from his balance; he had seen that nothing he could do would bear an equality with Boy Bailey's natural impulses; pardon and generosity were the only course left open to him. The work was complete and pleasing; and now he had leisure to feel how weary he was. He shut his eyes with an exhausted man's content at the relaxation of effort, and opened them again to find the Boer had returned and was standing in the doorway. He started upright, amazed to find that sleep had trapped him while he leaned and was aware that the Boer made a sudden and indistinct movement. Something heavy struck the ground at his feet.

He looked down at it where it lay, white and rounded, and recognized Mrs. du Preez's bundle, for which Boy Bailey had been ready to kick her into dumbness. Without addressing a word to him, the Boer had tossed him that double handful of money.

It took him a moment to realize what had taken place.

"What 's this for?" he demanded then, possessed by a sudden anger that forgot he spoke from the mouth of a negro to ears of a white man.

"It is true you speak English, then?" said the Boer. "That is money—about a hundred pounds. It is for you. Pick it up."

"Pick it up yourself," retorted the Kafir. "I don't want your money."

"Eh?" The Boer did not understand in the least. "It is for you," he repeated. "A hundred sovereigns, because you have been good, very good, to the Vrouw du Preez. It is in that bundle."

The Kafir turned on his heel. "Take care of your wife," he said shortly. "If you worry her now, she 'll be ill. Good night."

"Here," cried the Boer, as Kamis walked away. "Here, boy, wait. Come back."

Kamis halted. "I 've plenty of money," he answered. "I 'm not Boy Bailey, you know."

"Come here," called the Boer.

Kamis did not move, so he stepped down and went forward himself. The Kafir's last word stuck in his thought.

"No," he agreed. "But who are you? Man, why don't you take the money?"

"If I were a Boer, I should take it," answered Kamis. "I 'd pick it up from a dunghill, would n't I? But, then, you see, I 'm not a Boer. I 'm a Kafir."

"What do you want, then?" demanded Christian.

"Oh, nothing that you can give," was the retort.

"Well—but you must have something," urged Christian. "You—you have saved my wife."

"And you haven't even said 'thank you,'" replied the Kafir.

"I threw you the money," protested Christian. "It is a hundred pounds. But—well—you have been good and I thank you."

The Kafir laughed. He knew the mere words created an epoch, for Boers do not thank Kafirs. They pay them, but no more. Strange how a matter of darkness abrogates a difference of color. It would never have happened in the daytime.

"You 're satisfied, then?" he inquired.

"Me?" The Boer was puzzled. "You will take the money now?"

"No, thanks. I 'm too—oh, much too tired and hungry to carry it. You see, I brought your wife a long way."

"Yes," said Christian. "She said so—a very long way. I will wake the boys [the Kafirs of the household]. They will find you a place to sleep and I will make them bring you some food."

"No, thanks," said the Kafir again. "I don't speak their language. You—you haven't a man who speaks English, I suppose?"

"No," said Christian. "You want—yes, I see. But—you 'd better take the money."

"I don't want it."

"But take it," urged the Boer. "A hundred pounds—it is much. Perhaps it is more; I have not counted it. If it is less, I will give the rest, to make a hundred pounds. You will take it—not?"

"No." The answer was definite. "No—I won't take it, I tell you."

"Then—" Christian half-turned towards the house, with a heaviness in his movements which had not been noticeable before. "Come in and eat," he bade gloomily. "*Gott verdam*—come and eat."

The Kafir checked another laugh. "With pleasure," he said, and followed at the Boer's back.

The Boer stooped to pick up the bundle of money where it lay on the earth and led the way without looking round to the kitchen where he had left his wife. The Kafir paused in the kitchen door, looking in, acutely alive to the delicacy of a situation in which he figured, under the Boer's eye, as part of the company which included the Boer's wife. He waited to see how Christian would adjust matters.

The table was spread with the materials of supper. Mrs. du Preez had a chair by it, and now leaned over it, with her head resting on her arms, to make room for which plates and cups were disordered. Her flowery hat was still on her head; she had not commanded the energy necessary to withdraw the long pins that held it and take it off. In her dust-caked best clothes, she sprawled among the food and slept, and the paraffin lamp on the wall shed its uncharitable glare on her unconscious back.

Christian dumped the heavy little bundle on the table beside her and she moved and muttered. He called her by name. With a sigh she dragged her heavy head up and her black-rimmed tragic eyes opened to them in an agony of weariness. They rested on the waiting Kafir on the doorway.

"You 've brought him in?" she said. "Christian, I hoped you would."

"He is going to eat with me," said Christian, with eyes that evaded hers.

"Yes," she said dully.

"And you go to bed," he urged, with an effort to seem natural. "You—you 're too sleepy; you go to bed now. I 'll be up soon."

"But, Christian," she protested, while she wrestled with the need for slumber that possessed her; "I got to speak to you. There—there 's something I want to say to you first about—about—"

"No." His hand rested on her shoulder. "It 's all right. There 's nothing to say; I don't want to hear anything. It 's all right now; you go on up to bed."

She rose obediently, but with an effort, and her hands moved blindly in front of her as she made for the door, as though she feared to fall.

"Good night, Christian," she quavered. "You 're awful good. An' good night, you"—to the Kafir. "You been a white man to me."

"Good night," replied Kamis, and made way for her carefully.

The queer little scene was sufficiently clear to him. He understood it entirely. The Boer, face to face with an emergency for which his experience and his training prescribed no treatment, could stoop to sit at meat with a Kafir, but he could not suffer his wife to share that descent. The white woman must be preserved at any cost in her aloofness, her sanctity, none the less strong for being artificial, from contact and communion with a black man. Better anything than that.

"Sit down," bade Christian. "Take one of those cups, and I will bring you coffee."

"Thank you," replied the Kafir, and obeyed.

The paraffin lamp shed its unwinking light on a scene that challenged irresponsible fancy with the reality of crazy fact. The Boer's consciousness of the portentous character of the event governed him strongly; there was majesty in his bearing as he brought the coffee pot from the fire and stood at the side of the seated Kafir and poured him a cupful. It was done with the high sense of ceremony, the magnificent humility, of a Pope washing the immaculate feet of highly sanitary and disinfected beggars.

"There is mutton," he said, pointing; "or I have sardines. Shall I fetch a tin?"

"I will have mutton, thanks," replied Kamis, with an equal formality, and drew the dish towards him.

The Boer seated himself at the opposite side of the table. The compact, as he understood it, required that he should eat also. He cut himself meat and bread very precisely, doubtfully aware that he was rather hungry. This, he felt vaguely, stained a situation where all should have been formal and symbolic. He ate slowly, with a dim, religious appetite.

Kamis might have found the meal more amusing if he had been less weary. An idea that he would insist upon conversation visited him, but he dismissed it; he was really too tired to assault the heavy solemnity which faced him across the table. It would yield to no casual advances; he would have to exert himself, to be specious and dexterous, to waylay the man's interest.

He pushed his unfinished food from him.

"I will go home, now," he said.

"You have had enough?" questioned the Boer.

"Thank you," said Kamis, and rose.

The Boer rose, too, very tall and aloof. His hand touched the money which still lay on the table.

"You will take this with you?" he questioned. "No?" as the Kafir shook his head. "You are sure? You will not have it? Nor anything else?"

"I have had all I want," replied Kamis, taking up his battered hat. "You 've done everything, and more than I thought you would."

The Boer was insistent.

"I want you to be—satisfied," he said, still standing in the same place. Kamis found his lofty, still face rather impressive. It had a certain high austerity.

"You must say if you want anything more," he went on, with a grave persistence. "All you want you shall have—till you are satisfied."

("Can't rest under an obligation to me," thought Kamis).

"I 'm quite satisfied," he replied. "You don't owe me anything, if that 's what 's worrying you. I 'm paid in full."

"In full," repeated the Boer. "You are paid in full?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then. And now you shall go."

He went before and stood at the side of the door while Kamis went forth, ready to bolt it at his back.

"Tell me," he said, as the Kafir stepped over the threshold. "Who are you?"

The other turned. "My name is Kamis," he replied.

"Kamis?" The Boer leaned forward, trying to peer at him. "You said—Kamis? You are the little Kafir that the General Lascelles took when—"

"Yes," said the Kafir.

The Boer did not answer at once. He hung in the doorway, staring.

"I saw them hang your father," he said at last, very slowly.

"Did you?" said Kamis. "Good night."

"Good night," replied the Boer when he was some paces distant and closed the door carefully.

The noise of its bolts being shot home was the last sound the Kafir heard from the house. The wind that comes before the dawn touched him and he shivered. He turned up the collar of his coat and set off walking as briskly as his fatigue would allow.

CHAPTER XIV

THE drawing-room of the Sanatorium was available until tea-time for the practice of correspondence. It offered for this purpose a small table with the complexion of mahogany and a leather top, upon which reposed an inkstand containing three pots, marked respectively in plain letters, "black," "red," and "copying," and a number of ancient pens. When a new arrival had overcome his wonder and consternation at the various features of the establishment, he usually signalized his acceptance of what lay before him by writing to Capetown for a fountain-pen. As old inhabitants of the Cape reveal themselves to the expert eye by carrying their tobacco loose in a side pocket of their coats, so the patient who had conceded Dr. Jakes' claims to indulgence was to be distinguished by the possession of a pen that made him independent of the establishment's supply and frequently by stains of ink upon his waistcoat in the region of the left-hand upper pocket, where custom has decided a man shall carry his fountain-pen.

Margaret had brought her unanswered letters to this privacy and her fountain-pen was busy in the undisturbed interval following the celebration of lunch. Hers was the common task of the exile in South Africa, to improvize laboriously letters to people at home who had plenty to see and do and no need of the post to inject spice into their varied lives. There was

nothing to write about, nothing to relate; the heat of the sun, the emptiness of the veld, the grin of Fat Mary—each of her letters played over these worn themes. Yet unless they were written and sent, the indifferent folk to whom they were addressed would not write to her, and the weekly mail, with its excitements and its reminders, would fail her. No dweller in lands where the double knock of the postman comes many times in the day can know the thrill of the weekly mail, discharged from the steamship in Capetown and heralded in its progress up the line by telegrams that announce to the little dorps along the railway the hour of its coming. They have not waited with a patient, preoccupied throng in the lobby of the post-office where the numbered boxes are, and heard beyond the wooden partition the slam of the bags and the shuffle of the sorters, talking at their work about things remote from the mail. The Kafir mail-runners, with their skinny naked legs and their handfuls of smooth sticks know how those letters are awaited in the hamlets and farms far remote from the line, by sun-dried, tobacco-flavored men who are up before the dawn to receive them, by others whose letters are addressed to names they are not called by, and by Mrs. Jakes, full-dressed and already a little tired two hours before breakfast. All those letters are paid for by screeds that suck dry the brains of their writers, desperately searching over the chewed ends of penholders for suggestions on barren ground.

There was one letter which Margaret had set herself to compose that had a different purpose. There were not lacking signs that her position in Dr. Jakes' household would sooner or later become impossible, and it

was desirable to clear the road for a retreat when no other road would be open to her. It was not only that Mrs. Jakes burned to be rid of her and had taken of late to dim hints of her desire in this respect, for Margaret was prepared, if she were forced to it, to find Mrs. Jakes' enmity amusing and treat it in that light. Such a course, she judged would paralyze Mrs. Jakes; in the face of laughter, the little woman was impotent. But there was also the prospect, daily growing nearer and more threatening, of an exposure which would show her ruthlessly forth as the friend and confidante of the Kafir, Kamis, the woman for whom Ford and Mr. Samson, had, in their own phrase, "no use." The hour when that exposure should be made loomed darkly ahead; nothing could avert its sinister advance upon her, nor lighten it of its quality of doom. She no longer invited her secret to make itself known. By degrees the warnings of Kamis, the threats of Boy Bailey, the malice of Mrs. Jakes, had struck their roots in her consciousness, and she was becoming acclimatized to the South-African spirit which threatens with vague penalties, not the less real for being vague, such transgressors as she of its one iron rule of life and conduct. When it should come upon her, she decided, she would summon her strength to accept it, and confront it serenely, in the manner of good breeding. But when that was done, she would have to go.

She was writing therefore to the legal uncle of Lincoln's Inn Fields, who controlled her affairs and manifested himself with sprightly letters and punctual cheques. He was an opinionative uncle, like most men who jest along the established lines of humor, but

amenable to a reasonable submissiveness on the part of his ward and niece. He liked to be inflexible—good-naturedly inflexible, like an Olympian who condescends to earth, but he could be counted upon to repay an opportunity for a display of his inflexibility by liberal indulgence upon other points. Therefore Margaret, after consideration, commenced the serious part of her epistle to the heathen with a suggestion in regard to investments which she knew would rouse him. Then, in a following paragraph:

I am better than I was when I came out, but not better than I was a month ago, and I don't think I am improving as rapidly as Dr. David hoped. It may be that I am a little too far to the East of the Karoo. Was it you or somebody else who advised me to keep to the West?

"That 'll help to fetch him," murmured Margaret, as she wrote the last words.

Perhaps, later on, if Dr. Jakes thinks well of it, I might move to a place I hear of over in the West. I 'm letting you know now in plenty of time; but I don't want you to think there is anything seriously wrong. Please don't be at all anxious.

"Now something fluffy," pondered Margaret. "If I get it right, he 'll order me to go."

What makes me hesitate, she wrote, is the trouble it will cost me to move from here. Would you please show this letter to Dr. David and ask his opinion?

"That 'll do the trick," she decided unscrupulously.

"Dr. David will see there 's something in it and he 'll back me up. And then, when the row comes, they shall each have a cut at me,—Mrs. Jakes and Fat Mary and all—they shall each have their chance to draw blood, and then I 'll go."

While she wrote, there had been the sound of footsteps on the stone floor of the hall outside the room, but she had been too busy to note them. Otherwise, she would quickly have marked an unfamiliar foot among them. They were reduced to that at the Sanatorium; they knew every foot that sounded on its floors and a strange one fetched them running to look from doors. But Margaret's occupation had robbed her of that mild exhilaration, and she looked up all unsuspiciously as Mrs. Jakes pushed open the door of the drawing-room, entered and closed it carefully behind her.

She came a couple of paces into the room and halted, looking at the girl in a manner that recalled to Margaret that fantastic night when she had come with a candle to seek aid for Dr. Jakes. Though she had not now her little worried smile, she wore the same bewildered and embarrassed aspect, as of a purpose crossed and complicated by considerations and doubts.

"Are you looking for me, Mrs. Jakes?" asked Margaret, when she had waited in vain for her to speak.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Jakes, in a hushed voice, and remained where she stood.

Again Margaret waited in vain for her to speak.

"I 'm rather busy just now," she said. "What is it you want with me, please?"

Mrs. Jakes looked to see that the door was closed before she answered.

"It is n't me," she said then. "We—we don't get

on very well, Miss Harding; but this is n't my doing. I 've never whispered a word to a soul. I have n't, indeed, if I never speak another word."

Margaret stared at her, perceiving suddenly that the small bleak woman was all a-thrill with some nervous tension. Her own nerves quivered in response to it.

"What is it?" she demanded. "What has happened?"

"It 's the police," breathed Mrs. Jakes. She gave the word the accent in which she felt it. "The police," she said, with a stricken sense of all that police stand for, of which unbearable and public shame is chief. She was trembling, and her small hands, with their rough red knuckles like raw scars upon them, were picking feverishly at her loose black skirt.

Margaret's heart beat the more quickly at the mere tone of her whisper, fraught with dim fears; but the words conveyed nothing to her. If anything, they relieved her. In the hinterland of her consciousness the forward-cast shadow of that impending hour was perpetually dark; but the police could have no concern in that.

"Oh, do please talk plainly," she said irritably. "What exactly do you want to tell me? And what have I got to do with the police?"

The stimulus of her impatient tones was what was needed to restore Mrs. Jakes to coherence. She stared at the girl with a sort of stupefaction.

"What have you got to do with it," she repeated. "Why—it 's all about you. Somebody 's told about you and that Kafir—about you knowing him and all about him, and now Mr. Van Zyl is in the doctor's study. He 's come to inquire about it."

"Oh," said Margaret slowly.

It had struck then, the bitter hour of revelation; it had crept upon her out of an ambush of circumstance when she least expected it, and the reckoning was due. There was to be no time allowed her in which to build up her courage; even her retreat must be over strange roads. Before the gong went to gather the occupants of the house for tea, the stroke would have fallen, and her place in the minds of her fellows would be with Dr. Jakes on the hearth-rug, an outcast from their circle. Unless, indeed, Dr. Jakes should also decline her company, as seemed likely.

It was the image in her mind of a scornful and superior Jakes that excited the smile with which she looked up at Jakes' frightened wife.

"So long as he does n't bother me, he can inquire as much as he likes," she said.

Mrs. Jakes did not understand. "It 's you he 's going to inquire of," she said. "I suppose, of course—I suppose you 'll tell him about—about that night?"

"I shan't tell him anything," replied Margaret. "Oh, you need n't be afraid, Mrs. Jakes. I 'm not going to take this opportunity of punishing you for all your unpleasantness. I shall simply refuse to answer any questions at all."

"You can't do that." Mrs. Jakes showed her relief plainly in her face and in the relaxation of her attitude. She had forgotten one of the first rules of her manner of warfare, which is to doubt the enemy's word. But in spite of a reluctant gratitude for the contemptuous mercy accorded to her, she felt dully resentful at this high attitude of Margaret's towards the terrors of the police.

"You can't do that," she said. "He 's got a right to know—and he 's a sub-inspector. He 'll insist—he 'll make you tell—"

"I think not," said Margaret quietly.

"But he 's—"

Mrs. Jakes broke off sharply as a hand without turned the handle of the door and pushed it open. Ford appeared, and paused at the sight of them in conversation.

"Hallo," he said. "Am I interrupting?"

Mrs. Jakes hesitated, but Margaret answered with decision.

"Not at all," she said. "Come in, please."

It occurred to her that the blow would be swifter if Ford himself were present when it fell and there were no muddle of explanations to drag it out.

Ford entered reluctantly, scenting a quarrel between the two and suspicious of Margaret's intentions in desiring his presence.

"There 's a horse and orderly by the steps," he said. "Is Van Zyl somewhere about? That 's why I came in, to see if he was here."

"He—he is in the study," answered Mrs. Jakes, in extreme discomfort. She turned to Margaret. "If you will come now, I will take you to him."

Ford turned, surprised.

"What for?" asked Margaret.

"He—sent for you." Mrs. Jakes did not understand the question; she only perceived dimly that some quality in the situation was changed and that she no longer counted in it.

"But what the dickens did he do that for?" asked Ford.

"We 'll see," said Margaret, forestalling Mrs. Jakes' bewildered reply. "Please tell him, Mrs. Jakes, that I am here and can spare him a few minutes at once."

"Yes," acquiesced Mrs. Jakes, helplessly, and departed.

Ford came lounging across the room to Margaret.

"What 's up?" he inquired. "You have n't been murdering somebody and not letting me help?"

Margaret shook her head. She was standing guard over her composure and could not afford to jest.

"Sit down over there," she bade him, motioning him towards the couch at the other side of the wide room. "And don't go away, even if he asks you to. Then you 'll hear all about it."

He wondered but obeyed slowly, leaning back against the end of the couch with one long leg lying up on the cushions.

"If he talks in the tone of his message to you," he said meditatively, "I shall be for punching his head."

Sub-Inspector Van Zyl had had the use of a clothes-brush before expressing his desire to see Margaret; it was a tribute he paid to his high official mission. He had cleared himself and his accoutrement of dust and the stain of his journey; and it was with the enhanced impressiveness of spick-and-span cleanliness that he presented himself in the drawing-room, pausing in the doorway with his spurred heels together to lift his hand in a precise and machine-like salute. At his back, Mrs. Jakes' unpretentious black made a relief for his rigid correctitude of attire and pose, and the pallid agitation of her countenance, peering in fearful curiosity to one side of him, heightened his military stolidity. His

stone-blue eyes rested on Ford's recumbence with a shadow of surprise.

"Afternoon, Ford," he said curtly. "You 'll excuse me, but I 've a word or two to say to Miss Harding."

"Afternoon, Van Zyl," replied Ford, not moving. "Miss Harding asked me to stay, so don't mind me."

Van Zyl looked at him inexpressively. "I 'm on duty," he said. "Sorry, but I wish you 'd go. My business is with Miss Harding."

"Fire away," replied Ford. "I shan't say a word unless Miss Harding wishes it."

Margaret moved in her chair.

"You will say what you please," she said. "Don't regard me at all, Mr. Ford. Now—what can I do for you, Mr. Van Zyl?"

Van Zyl finished his scrutiny of Ford and turned to her.

"I sent to ask you to see me in the other room, Miss Harding, because I thought you would prefer me to speak to you in private," he said, with his wooden preciseness of manner. "That was why. Sorry if it offended you. However—"

He stood aside and held the door while Mrs. Jakes entered, and closed it behind her. Stalking imperturbably, he placed a chair for her and drew one out for himself, depositing his badged "smasher" hat on the ground beside it. Seated, he drew from his smoothly immaculate tunic a large note-book and snapped its elastic band open and laid it on his knee. Ford, from his place on the couch, watched these preparations with gentle interest.

Van Zyl looked up at Margaret with a pencil in his

fingers. His pale, uncommunicative eyes fastened on her with an unemotional assurance in their gaze.

"First," he said; "where were you, Miss Harding, on the afternoon of the –th?"

He mentioned a date to which Margaret's mind ran back nimbly. It was the day on which Boy Bailey had made terms from the top of the dam wall, the day on which the Kafir had kissed her hand, nearly two weeks before.

She had herself sufficiently in hand, and returned his gaze with a faint smiling tranquillity that told him nothing.

"I have no information to give you, Mr. Van Zyl," she replied evenly. "It is quite useless to ask me any questions; I shan't answer them."

He was not disturbed. "Sorry," he said, "but I 'm afraid you must. I hope you 'll remember that I have my duty to do, Miss Harding."

"Must, eh?"

That was Ford, thoughtfully, from the couch. Van Zyl looked in his direction sharply with a brief frown, but let it pass.

"It 's no use, Mr. Van Zyl," said Margaret. "I simply am not going to answer any questions, and your duty has nothing to do with me. So if there is nothing else that you wish to say to me, your business is finished."

"No," he said; "it isn't finished yet, Miss Harding. You refuse to say where you were on that afternoon?"

Margaret smiled slowly and he made a quick note in his book.

"I ought to say, perhaps," he went on, looking up when he had finished writing, "that the information I

am asking for relates to a—a person, who is wanted by the police on a charge of sedition and incitement to commit a breach of the peace. You were seen on the afternoon in question in the company of that—person, Miss Harding; and I believe—I *believe* you can help us to lay hands on him."

"Is it Samson?" inquired Ford, raising his head. "I 've always had my suspicions of Samson."

"Oh, Mr. Ford," exclaimed Mrs. Jakes, pained.

"It 's not Mr. Samson," said the sub-inspector calmly; "and it is not any business of yours, Ford."

"Oh, yes; it is," answered Ford. "Because if it is n't Samson it must be me—unless it 's Jakes. You seem to think we see a good deal of company here, Van Zyl."

"I don't think anything at all," retorted the sub-inspector stiffly; "and I 've nothing to say to you. My business is with Miss Harding, and you won't help her by making a nuisance of yourself."

"Eh?" Ford sat up suddenly. "What 's that—won't help her? Are you trying to frighten Miss Harding by suggesting that you can use any sort of compulsion to her? Because, if that 's your idea, you 'd better look out what you 're doing."

"I 'm not responsible to you, Ford," replied Van Zyl shortly. "You can hold your tongue now. Miss Harding understands well enough what I mean."

"Oh, yes," said Margaret, as Ford looked towards her. "I understand, but I don't care."

It was taking its own strange course, but she was not concerned to deflect it or make it run more directly. She conserved her powers for the moment when the thing would be told, and Ford's indignant champion-

ship arrested brusquely by the mere name of her offense. Presently Van Zyl would cease to speak of "a person" and come out with the plain word, "Kafir." How he had gained his information she did not attempt to guess; but that he had the means to break her there was no doubting. She would answer no questions; she was determined upon that; but now that the hour of revelation was come, she would do nothing to fog it. It should pass and be done with and leave her with its consequences clear to weigh and abide.

She made a motion of the hand that hung over the back of her chair to Ford, as though she would hush him. He was puzzled and looked it, but subsided provisionally against the end of the couch again.

Van Zyl eased his shoulders in their bondage of slings and straps with a practised shrug, crossed one booted leg over the other and faced her afresh.

"Now, Miss Harding, you see that I am not speaking by guess; and it 's for you to say whether you will have the rest of this here or in private. I 'm anxious to give you every possible consideration."

"I shan't answer any questions," said Margaret, "and I decline any privacy, Mr. Van Zyl."

"No? Very well. I must do my duty as best I can," replied the sub-inspector, with official resignation. He referred to a back page of his note-book perfunctorily.

"On the –th of this month, man discovered weeping and disorderly on the platform at Zeekoe Siding, stated to Corporal Simms that he had been robbed of five hundred pounds by confidence trick on down train. Under examination, varied the sum, and finally adhered to figure of forty-three pounds odd, which he alleged was

part of fifty pounds he had received from the—person in whose company he had seen you."

"Ah!" Margaret found herself smiling absently at the memory of Boy Bailey making his bargain on the top of the dam wall, with his bare unbeautiful feet fidgeting in the grass.

Sub-inspector Van Zyl surveyed her with his impersonal stare and continued:

"He gave the name of Claude Richmond, but was afterwards identified as one Noah Bailey, alias Boy Bailey, alias Spotted Dog, etc., wanted by the police in connection with—a certain affair. On being charged, feigned to fall in a fit but came to under treatment, and made a certain communication, which was transmitted to me as bearing upon my search for this—person. The communication was detailed, Miss Harding, and he stood to it under a searching examination, and satisfied us that we were getting the truth out of him. Acting upon the information thus received, I next called upon you."

He looked up. "You see what I have to go upon?" he said. "Since you know yourself what took place on the afternoon about which I asked you, you can understand that the police require your assistance. Do you still refuse to answer me, Miss Harding?"

"Of course," replied Margaret.

Now it would come, she thought. Van Zyl would spare her no longer. She watched his smooth, tanned face with nervous trepidation.

He frowned slightly at her answer, and leaned forward with the note-book in his hand, his forefinger between the pages to keep the place.

"You do?" he demanded, his voice rising to a sharp note. Ford sat up again, watchful and angry. "You

refuse, do you? Now, look here, Miss Harding, we 'll have to make an end of this."

Ford struck in crisply. "Good idea," he said. "I suggest Miss Harding might quit the room for that purpose, and leave you to explain to me what the devil you mean by this."

Van Zyl turned on him quickly. "You look out," he said. "If I 've got to arrest you to shut your mouth, I 'll do it—and quick too."

"Why not?" demanded Ford. "That 'll be as good a way for you to get the lesson you need as any other."

"*You'll* get a lesson," began Van Zyl, making as though to rise and put his threat into action.

"Oh, please," cried Margaret; "none of this is necessary. Sit down, Mr. Ford; please sit down and listen. Mr. Van Zyl, you have only to speak out and you will be free from further trouble, I 'm sure."

"I 've taken too much trouble as it is," retorted the sub-inspector. "I 'll have no more of it."

He glared with purpose at Ford. Though he had not at any moment doffed his formality of demeanor, the small scene had lit a spark in him and he was newly formidable and forceful. Ford met his look with the narrow smile with which a man of his type masks a rising temper, but so far yielded to Margaret's urgency as to lean back upon one elbow.

"You 'll be sorry for all this presently," Margaret said to him warningly.

"Very soon, in fact," added the sub-inspector, "if he repeats the offense."

He settled himself again on his chair, confronting Margaret.

"Now, Miss Harding," he resumed briskly. "Out with it? You admit you were there, eh?"

"Oh, no," said Margaret. "You 're asking questions again, Mr. Van Zyl."

"And I 'm going to have an answer, too," he replied zestfully. "You 've got a wrong idea entirely of what 's before you. You can still have this in private, if you like; but here or elsewhere, you 'll speak or out comes the whole thing. Now, which is it going to be—sharp?"

"I 've nothing to tell you," she maintained.

His blond, neat face hardened.

"Have n't you, though. We 'll see? You know a Kafir calling himself—" he made a lightning reference to his book—"calling himself Kamis?"

She made no answer.

"You know the man, eh? It was with him you spent the afternoon of the –th, was n't it? Under the wall of the dam down yonder—yes? You 've met him more than once, and always alone?"

She kept a constraint on herself to preserve her faintly-smiling indifference of countenance, but her face felt stiff and cold, and her smile as though it sagged to a blatant grin. She did not glance across to see how Ford had received the news; that had suddenly become impossible.

"You see?" There was a restrained triumph in Van Zyl's voice. "We know more than you think, young lady—and more still. *You* won't answer questions, won't you? You let a Kafir kiss you under a wall, and then put up this kind of bluff."

There was an explosion from Ford as he leaped to his feet, with the hectic brilliant on each cheek.

"You liar," he cried. "You filthy Dutch liar."

Van Zyl did not even turn his head. A hard smile parted his squarely-cut lips as he watched Margaret. At his word, she had made a small involuntary movement as though to put a hand on her bosom, but had let it fall again.

"You may decide to answer that, perhaps," suggested the sub-inspector. "Do you deny that he kissed you?"

There was a pause, while Ford stood waiting and the sound of his breathing filled the interval. The fingers of Margaret's left hand bent and unbent the flap of the envelope destined for the legal uncle, but her mind was far from it and its contents. "You liar," Ford had cried, and it had had a fine sound; even now she had but to rise as though insulted and walk from the room, and his loyalty would endure, unspotted, unquestioning, touchy and quick. She might have done well to choose the line that would have made that loyalty valid, and she felt herself full of regrets, of pain and loss, that it must find itself betrayed. The vehemence of the cry was testimony to the faith that gave it utterance.

And then, for the first time in the interview, she dwelt upon the figure that stood at the back of all this disordered trouble—that of Kamis, remote from their agitated circle, companioning in his solitude with griefs of his own. He came into her mind by way of comparison with the directness and vivid anger of Ford, standing tense and agonized for her reply, with all his honest soul in his thin dark face. His flimsy silk clothes made apparent the lean youth of his body. The other went to and fro in the night and the silence in shabby tweeds, and his face denied an index to the strong spirit that

drove him. He suffered behind blubber lips and a comical nose; he was humble and grateful. The two had nothing in common if it were not that faith in her, to which she must now do the peculiar justice that the situation required.

"Let 's have it," urged the sub-inspector. "He kissed you, this nigger did, and you let him? Speak up."

Boy Bailey had said, imaginatively: "She held out both her arms to him—wide; and he took hold of her an' hugged her, kissin' her till I could n't stand the sight any longer. 'You shameless woman!' I shouted"—at that point he had been kicked by a scandalized corporal, and had screamed. "I wish I may die if he did n't kiss her," was the form that kicking finally reduced it to, but they could not kick that out of him. He stood for one kiss while bruises multiplied upon him.

"Well, did he kiss you or did n't he?"

Margaret sighed. "I will tell you that," she said wearily. "Yes, he did—he kissed my hand."

Sub-inspector Van Zyl sat up briskly. "I thought we 'd get something before we were done," he said, and smiled with a kind of malice at Ford. "You 'd like to apologize, I expect?"

Ford did not answer him; he was staring in mere amazement at Margaret's immovable profile.

"Is that true?" he demanded.

Margaret forced herself to look round and meet the wonder of his face.

"Oh, quite," she answered. "Quite true."

His eyes wavered before hers as though he were ashamed and abashed. He put an uncertain hand to his lips.

"I see," he said, very thoughtfully, and sat again upon the couch.

"Well, after that, what 's the sense of keeping anything back?" Van Zyl went on confidently. "You see what comes of standing out against the police? Now, what are your arrangements for meeting this Kafir? Where do you send to let him know he 's to come and see you?"

"No," said Margaret. "It 's no use; I won't tell you any more."

"Oh, yes, you will." Van Zyl felt quite sure of it. He eyed her acutely and decided to venture a shot in the dark. "You 'll tell me all I ask,—d' you hear? I have n't done with you yet. You 've seen him at night, too, when you were supposed to be in bed. You can't deceive me. I 've seen your kind before, plenty of them, and I know the way to deal with them."

His shot in the dark found its mark. So he knew of that night when Dr. Jakes had fallen in the road. Mrs. Jakes must have told him, and her protests had been uneasy lies. Margaret carefully avoided looking at her; in this hour, all were to receive mercy save herself.

Van Zyl went on, rasping at her in tones quite unlike the thickish staccato voice which he kept for his unofficial moments. That voice she would never hear again; impossible for her ever to regain the status of a person in whom the police have no concern.

"You 'll save yourself trouble by speaking up and wasting no time about it," he urged, with the kind of harsh good nature a policeman may use to the offender who provides him with employment. "You 've *got* to do it, you know. How do you get hold of your nigger-friend when you want him?"

She shook her head without speaking.

"Answer!" he roared suddenly, so that she started in her chair. "What 's the arrangement you 've got with him? None of your airs with me, my girl. Out with it, now—what 's the trick?"

She looked at him affrightedly; he seemed about to spring upon her from his chair and dash at her to wring an answer out of her by force. But from the sofa, where Ford sat, with his head in his hands, came no sign. Only Mrs. Jakes, frozen where she sat, uttered a vague moan.

"Wha—what 's this?"

The door opened noiselessly and Dr. Jakes showed his face of a fallen cherub in the opening, with sleepy eyes mildly questioning. Margaret saw him with quick relief; the intolerable situation must change in some manner by his arrival.

"I heard—I heard—was it *you* shouting, Van Zyl?" he inquired, stammeringly, as he came in.

"Yes," replied the sub-inspector, shortly.

"Oh!" Jakes felt uncertainly for his straggling mustache. "Whom were you shouting at?" he inquired, after a moment of hesitation.

"I was speaking to her," replied the other impatiently.

The doctor followed the movement of his hand and the light of his spectacles focused on Margaret stupidly.

"Well." He seemed baffled. "Miss Harding, you mean, eh?"

The sub-inspector nodded. "You 're interrupting an inquiry, Dr. Jakes."

"Oh." Again the doctor seemed to wrestle with thoughts. "Am I?"

"Yes. You 'll excuse us, but—"

"No," said Jakes, with an appearance of grave thought. "No; certainly not. You—you must n't shout here."

"Look here," began Van Zyl.

The doctor turned his back on him and came over to Margaret, treading lumberingly across the worn carpet.

"Can't allow shouting," he said. "It means—temperature. I—I think you 'd better—yes, you 'd better go and lie down for a while, Miss Harding."

He was as vague as a cloud, a mere mist of benevolence.

As unexpectedly and almost as startlingly as Van Zyl's sudden loudness, Mrs. Jakes spoke from her chair.

"You must take the doctor's advice, Miss Harding," she said.

Margaret rose, obediently, her letters in her hand. Van Zyl rose too.

"Once and for all," he said loudly, "I won't allow any—"

"I 'll report you, Van Zyl," said the little doctor, huskily. "You 're—you 're endangering life—way you 're behaving. Go with Mrs. Jakes, Miss Harding."

"*You 'll* report me," exclaimed Van Zyl.

"Ye–es," said Jakes, foggily. "I—I call Mr. Ford to witness—"

He turned quaveringly towards the couch and stopped abruptly.

"What 's this?" he cried, in stronger tones, and walked quickly toward the bent figure of the young

man. "Van Zyl I—I hold you responsible. You 've done this—with your shouting."

Margaret was in the door; she turned to see the doctor raise Ford's head and lift it back against the cushions. Van Zyl went striding towards them and aided to place him on his back on the couch. As the doctor stood up and stepped back, she saw the thin face with the high spot of red on each cheek and the blood that ran down the chin from the wry and painful mouth.

"Hester," Dr. Jakes spoke briskly. "The ergotin—and the things. In the study; you know."

"I know." And Mrs. Jakes—so her name was Hester—ran pattering off.

They shut Margaret out of the room, and she sat on the bottom step of the stairs, waiting for the news Mrs. Jakes had promised, between breaths, to bring out to her. Van Zyl, ordered out unceremoniously—the doctor had had a fine peremptory moment—and allowing a certain perturbation to be visible on the regulated equanimity of his features, stood in the hall and gave her side glances that betrayed a disturbed mind.

"Miss Harding," he said presently, after long thought; "I hope you don't think it 's any pleasure to me to do all this?"

Margaret shook her head. "You can do what you like," she said. "I shan't complain."

"It is n't that," he answered irritably, but she interrupted him.

"I don't care what it is," she said. "I don't care; I don't care about anything. Stand there, if you like, or come and sit here; but don't talk any more till we know what 's happened in there."

Sub-inspector Van Zyl coughed, but after certain hes-

itation, he made up his mind. When Mrs. Jakes came forth, tiptoe and pale but whisperingly exultant, she found them sitting side by side on the stairs in the attitude of amity, listening in strained silence for sounds that filtered through the door of the room. She was pressed and eager, with no faculty to spare for surprise.

"Splendid," she whispered. "Everything 's all right—thank God. But if it had n't been for the doctor, well! I'm going to fetch the boys with the stretcher to carry him up to his room."

"I 'm awfully glad," said Van Zyl as she hurried away.

"So am I," said Margaret. "But I ought to have seen before the doctor did. I ought to have known—and I did know, really—that he would have taken you by the throat before then, if something had n't happened to him."

She had risen, to go up the stairs to her room and now stood above him, looking down serenely upon him.

"Me by the throat," exclaimed Van Zyl, slightly shocked.

Margaret nodded.

"As Kamis would," she said slowly. "And choke you, and choke you, and choke you."

She went up then without looking back, leaving him standing in the hall, baffled and outraged.

CHAPTER XV

NOT the stubbornness of a race too prone to enthusiasms, any more than increasing years and the *memento mori* in his chest, could withhold Mr. Samson from the zest with which he initiated each new day. Bathed, razored and tailored, he came out to the stoep for his early constitutional, his hands joined behind his back, his soft hat cocked a little forward on his head, and tasted the air with puffs and snorts of appetite, walking to and fro with a eupeptic briskness in which only the closest observer might have detected a delicate care not to over do it. Nothing troubled him at this hour of the morning; it belonged to a duty which engrossed it to the exclusion of all else, and not till it was done was Mr. Samson accessible to the claims of time and place.

He looked straight before him as he strode; his manner of walking did not allow him to bestow a glance upon the Karoo as he went. Head well up, chest open —what there was of it—and neck swelling over the purity of his collar: that was Mr. Samson. It was only when Mrs. Jakes came to the breakfast-room door and set the gong booming melodiously, that he relaxed and came back to a mild interest in the immediate earth, as though the gong were a permission to stand at ease and dismiss. He halted by the steps to wipe his monocle in his white abundant handkerchief, and sur-

veyed, perfunctorily at first and then with a narrowing interest, the great extent of brown and gray-green that stretched away from the foot of the steps to a silvery and indeterminate distance.

A single figure was visible upon it, silhouetted strongly against the low sky, and Mr. Samson worked his monocle into his eye and grasped it with a pliant eyebrow to see the clearer. It was a man on a horse, moving at a walk, minutely clear in that crystal air in spite of the distance. The rider was far from the road, apparently aimless and at large upon the veld; but there was something in his attitude as he rode that held Mr. Samson gazing, a certain erectness and ease, something conventional, the name of which dodged evasively at the tip of his tongue. He knew somebody who sat on a horse exactly like that; dash it, who was it, now? It was n't that Dutchman, Du Preez, nor his long-legged youngster; they rode like Dutchmen. This man was more like—more like—ah! Mr. Samson had got it. The only folk who had that look in the saddle were troopers; this must be a man of the Mounted Police.

A tinge of annoyance colored his thoughts, for the far view of the trooper, slowly quartering the land, brought back to his mind a matter of which it had been purged by the ritual morning march along the stoep, and he found it returning again as distasteful as ever. He had been made a party to its details by Mrs. Jakes, when he inquired regarding Ford's breakdown. The communication had taken place at the foot of the stairs, when he was preparing to ascend to bed, on the evening of Van Zyl's visit. At dinner

he had noted no more than that Ford was absent and that Margaret was uneasy; he kept his question till her skirt vanished at the bend of the stairs.

"I say; what 's up?" he asked then.

Mrs. Jakes, standing by to give good night, as her wont was, fluttered. She gave a little start that shook her clothes exactly like the movement of an agitated bird in a cage, and stared up at him, rather breathlessly, while he leaned against the balustrade and awaited her answer.

"I don't know what you mean." It was a formula that always gave her time to collect her thoughts.

"Oh, yes, you do," insisted Mr. Samson, with severe geniality. "Ford laid up and Miss Harding making bread pills, and all that. What 's the row?"

Mrs. Jakes regarded him with an eye as hard and as wary as a fowl's, and then looked round to see that the study door was securely shut.

"I 'm afraid, Mr. Samson," she said, in the low tones of confidential intercourse—"I 'm afraid we 've been mistaken in Miss Harding."

"Eh? What 's that?"

Old Mr. Samson *would* speak as though he were addressing a numerous company, and Mrs. Jakes' nervousness returned at his loud exclamation. She made hushing noises.

"Yes, but what 's all this nonsense?" demanded Mr. Samson. "Somebody 's been pullin' your leg, Mrs. Jakes."

"No, indeed, Mr. Samson," Mrs. Jakes assured him hastily, as though urgent to clear herself of an imputation. "There is n't any doubt about it,—I 'm sorry to say. You see, Mr. Van Zyl came here this afternoon and

wanted to see Miss Harding in the study. Well, she would n't go to him."

"Why the deuce should she?" inquired Mr. Samson warmly. "Who 's Van Zyl to send for people like this?"

"It was about a Kafir," said Mrs. Jakes. "The police are looking for the Kafir and Miss Harding refused to help them. So—"

Mr. Samson's lips moved soundlessly, and he changed his position with a movement of lively impatience.

"Let 's have it from the beginning, please, Mrs. Jakes," he said, with restraint. "Can't make head or tail of it—way you 're telling it. Now, why did this ass Van Zyl come here?"

It was the right way to get the tale told forthright. His indignation and his scorn fanned the spark of spite in the core of Mrs. Jakes, who perceived in Mr. Samson another victim to Margaret's duplicity. She was galled by the constant supply of champions of the girl's cause who had to be laid low one after the other. She addressed herself to the incredulity and anger in the sharp old face before her, and spoke volubly and low, telling the whole thing as she knew it and perhaps a little more than the whole. As she went on, she became consumed with eagerness to convince Mr. Samson. Her small disfigured hands moved jerkily in incomplete gestures, and she rose on tiptoe as though to approach nearer to the seat of his intelligence. He did not again interrupt her, but listened with intentness, watching her as the swift words tumbled on one another's heels from her trembling lips. His immobility and silence were agonizing to her.

"So that 's why I say that we 've been mistaken in

Miss Harding," she concluded at last. "You would n't have thought it of her, would you, Mr. Samson? And it is a shocking thing to come across here, in the house, is n't it?"

Mr. Samson withdrew a hand from his pocket, looked thoughtfully at three coins in the palm of it, and returned them to the pocket again.

"You 're quite certain," he asked, "that she admitted the kissin'? There 's no doubt about that?"

"If I never speak another word," declared Mrs. Jakes, with fervor. "If I die here where I stand. If I never move from this spot—those were her exact words. It was then that poor Mr. Ford had his attack—he was so horrified."

"Well," said Mr. Samson, with a sigh, after another inspection of his funds, "so that 's the trouble, is it?"

"The doctor and I are much disturbed," continued Mrs. Jakes. "Naturally disturbed. Such a thing has never happened here before."

Mr. Samson heaved himself upright and put one foot on the bottom stair.

"It 's only ignorance, of course," he said. "The poor little devil don't know what she 's letting herself in for. If she 'd only taken a bad turn after a month or so and—and gone out, Mrs. Jakes, we 'd have remembered her pleasantly enough then. Now, of course, she 'll have this story to live with. Van Zyl 'll put it about; trust him. Poor little bally fool."

"I 'm sorry for her, too, of course," replied Mrs. Jakes, putting out her hand to shake his. "Only of course I 'm—I 'm disgusted as well. Any woman would be."

"Yes," said Mr. Samson thoughtfully, commencing

the ascent; "yes, she 'll be sure to get lots of that, now."

It was a vexation that abode with him that night and through the next day; it kept him from the sincere repose which is the right of straightforward and uncompromising minds, whose cleanly-finished effects have no loose ends of afterthought dangling from them to goad a man into revising his conclusions. Lying in the dark, wide awake and regretful, he had a vision of her in her room, welcoming its solitude and its freedom from reproachful eyes, glad now not of fellows and their companionship but of this refuge. It gave him vague pain. He experienced a sense of resentment against the arrangement and complexity of affairs that had laid open this gulf at Margaret's feet, and made its edges slippery to trap her. A touch of a more personal anger entered his thoughts as he dwelt on the figure of the girl, the fine, dexterous, civilized creature that she had been. She had known how to hold him with a pleasant humor, a light and stimulating irreverence, and to soften it to the point at which she bade him close his eyes and kissed him. But—and Mr. Samson flushed to the heat at which men swear—the Kafir, the roaming criminal nigger, had had that much out of her. Mrs. Jakes had not been faithful to detail on that head. "Kiss," she had said, not "kissed her hand." Mr. Samson might have seen a difference where Van Zyl, lacking his pretty discrimination of degrees in the administration and reception of kisses, had seen none.

The morning had brought no counsel; the day had delivered itself of nothing that enlightened or consoled him. Margaret had managed somehow, after a

manner of her own, to withdraw herself from his immediate outlook, and there were neither collisions nor explanations. It was not so much that she preserved a distance as avoided contact, so that meals and meetings in the drawing-room or about the house suffered from no evidences of a change in their regard for each other. The adroitness with which it was contrived moved him to new regrets; she might, he thought, have done so well for herself, whereas now she was wasted.

This was the second morning since he had invaded Mrs. Jakes' confidences at the foot of the stairs and extracted her story from her. The gong at the breakfast-room door made soft blurred music at his back while he stood watching the remote figure of the trooper, sliding slowly across the skyline. It finished with a last note of added emphasis, a frank whack at the middle of the instrument, and he turned deliberately from his staring to obey it.

Mrs. Jakes, engine-driving the urn, was alone in the room when he entered, and gave him good morning with the smile which she had not varied for years.

"A beautiful day, is n't it?" she said.

"Oh, perfect," agreed Mr. Samson, receiving a cup of coffee from her. "I say. You have n't seen any signs of Van Zyl to-day, have you?"

"To-day? No," replied Mrs. Jakes, surprised. "Were you expecting—did he say—?"

Mr. Samson shook his head. "No; I don't know anything about him," he told her. "It 's just that matter of Miss Harding, you know. From the stoep, just now, I was watching a mounted man riding slowly about on the veld, and it looks as if they were arranging a search. Eh?"

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Jakes, "I do hope they won't come here again. I 've never had any trouble with the police before. And Mr. Van Zyl, generally so gentlemanly—when I saw how he treated Miss Harding, I was really sorry for her."

Mr. Samson sniffed. "Man must be a cad," he said. "Anyhow, I don't see what right he 's got to put his foot inside these doors. It was simply a bluff, I fancy. Next time he comes, I hope you 'll let me know, Mrs. Jakes. Can't have him treatin' that poor little fool like that, don't y' know."

"But they 've got a *right* to search, surely?" protested Mrs. Jakes. "And it never does to have the police against you, Mr. Samson. I had a cousin once —at least, he was n't exactly a cousin—but he took a policeman's number for refusing to arrest a man who had been rude to him, and the policeman at once took him in custody and swore the most dreadful oaths before the magistrate that he was drunk and disorderly. And my cousin—I always used to call him a cousin—was next door to a teetotaller."

"Perhaps the teetotaller bribed the policeman," suggested Mr. Samson, seriously. "Still—what about Miss Harding? She has n't said anything to you about goin' back home, has she?"

"No," said Mrs. Jakes. She let the teetotaller pass for the time being as the new topic opened before her. "But I wanted to speak to you about that, Mr. Samson."

"Best thing she can do," he said positively. "There 's a lot of people at Home who don't mind niggers a bit. Probably would n't hurt her for a month and her doctors can spot some other continent for her to do a cure in."

"Now I 'm very glad to hear you say so, Mr. Samson," declared Mrs. Jakes. "You see, what to do with her is a good deal on our minds—the doctor's and mine. My view is—she ought to go before the story gets about."

"Quite right," agreed Mr. Samson.

"But Eustace—he 's so considerate, you know. He thinks of her feelings. He 's dreadfully afraid that she 'll fancy we 're turning her out and be hurt. He really does n't quite see the real state of affairs; he has an idea it 'll all blow over and be forgotten."

Mr. Samson shook his head. "Not out here," he said. "That sort of story don't die; it lives and grows. Might get into the papers, even."

"Well, now," Mrs. Jakes' voice was soft and persuasive; "do you mind my telling the doctor how you look at it? He does n't pay any attention to what I say, but coming from you, it 's bound to strike him. It would be better than you talking to him about it, because he would n't care to discuss one of his patients with another; but if I were just to mention, as an argument, you know—"

"Oh, certainly," acquiesced Mr. Samson, "certainly. Those are my views; anybody can know 'em. Tell Jakes by all means."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Jakes, with feeling. "It does relieve me to know that you agree with me. And it *is* such a responsibility."

Margaret's entrance shortly afterwards brought their conference to a close, and Mr. Samson was able to return to his food with undivided attention.

Margaret's demeanor since the exposure was a phe-

nomenon Mrs. Jakes did not profess to understand. The tall girl came into the room with a high serenity that stultified in advance the wan little woman's efforts to meet her with a remote dignity; it suggested that Mrs. Jakes and her opinions were things already so remote from her interest that they could not recede further without becoming invisible. What she lacked, in Mrs. Jakes' view, was visible scars, tokens of punishment and suffering; she could conceive no other attitude in a person who stood so much in need of the mercy of her fellows. To a humility commensurate with her disapproval, she would have offered a forbearance barbed with condescension, peppered balm of her own brand, the distillation of her narrow and purposeful soul. As it was, she not only resented the girl's manner—she cowered.

"Good morning," said Margaret, smiling with intention.

"Good morning, Miss—ah—Miss Harding," was the best Mrs. Jakes could do.

"Morning," responded Mr. Samson, lifting his white head jerkily, hoping to convey preoccupation and casual absence of mind. "Morning, Miss Harding. Jolly day, what?"

"Oh, no end jolly," agreed Margaret, dropping into her place. "Yes, coffee, please, Mrs. Jakes."

"Certainly, Miss Harding," replied Mrs. Jakes, who had made offer of none, and fumbled inexpertly with the ingenious urn whose chauffeur and minister she was.

"How is Mr. Ford?" inquired Margaret next.

"Oh, yes," chimed in Mr. Samson, anxious to pre-

vent too short a reply; "how 's he this morning, Mrs. Jakes. Nicely, thank you, and all that—eh?"

Mrs. Jakes was swift to seize the opportunity to reply in Mr. Samson's direction exclusively.

"He 's not to get up to-day," she explained. "But he 's doing *very* well, thank you. When I asked him what he 'd like for breakfast, he said: 'Oh, everything there is, please.' But, of course, he 's had a shock."

"Er—yes," said Mr. Samson hurriedly. "I 'll look him up before lunch, if I may."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Jakes graciously.

"Good idea," said Margaret. "So will I."

Mrs. Jakes shot a pale and desperate glance at her and then looked for support to Mr. Samson. But that leaning tower of strength was eating devotedly and would not meet her eye.

She envisaged with inward consternation a future punctuated by such meals, with every meal partaking of the nature of a hostile encounter and every encounter closing with a defeat. Her respectability, her sad virtue, her record clean of stain, did not command heavy enough metal to breach the gleaming panoply of assurance with which Margaret opposed all her attacks, and she felt the grievance common to those who are ineffectually in the right. The one bright spot in the affair was the possibility that she might now bend Jakes to her purpose, and be deputed to give the girl notice that she must leave the Sanatorium. She felt she could quote Mr. Samson with great effect to the doctor.

"Mr. Samson feels strongly that she should leave at once. He said so in the plainest words," she would

report, and Jakes would be obliged to take account of it. Hitherto, her hints, her suggestions and even her supplications, had failed to move him. He had a way, at times, of producing from his humble and misty mildness a formidable obstinacy which brooked no opposition. With bent head, he would look up at her out of the corners of his eyes, while she added plausibility to volubility, unmoving and immovable. When she had done, for he always heard her ominously to an end, he would shake his head slightly and emit a negative. It was rather impressive; there was so little show of force about it; but Mrs. Jakes had long known that it betokened a barrier of refusal that it was useless to hope to surmount. If he were pressed further, he would rouse a little and amplify his meaning with phrases of a deplorable vulgarity and force. In his medical student days, the doctor had been counted a capable hand at the ruder kinds of out-patient work.

The last time she had pressed him to decree Margaret's departure was in the study, where he sat with his coat off and his shirt-sleeves turned up, as though he contemplated an evening of strenuousness; the bottles and glasses were grouped on the desk at his elbow. Mrs. Jakes had represented vivaciously her sufferings in having to meet Miss Harding and contain the emotions that effervesced in her bosom. She sat in the patient's chair, and carefully guided her eyes away from the drinking apparatus. The doctor had uttered his "No" as usual, and she tried, against her better sense, to reason with him.

"There 's me to think of, too," she urged anxiously. "The way she walks past me, Eustace, you 'd think I 'd never had a silk lining in my life."

"No," said the doctor again, with a little genteel cough behind three fingers. "No, we can't. 'T would n't do, Hester. Bringing her out o' bed in her night-gown that night—it was doing her dirt. Yes, I know all about the nigger, and dam lucky it was for me she 'd got him handy. I might have been there yet for all you did. And as for silk linings, don't you get your shirt out, Hester. She 's all right."

He put out a hand to the whisky bottle, looking at her impatiently with red-rimmed eyes, and she had risen with a sigh, knowing it was time for her to go. She fired one parting shot of sincere feeling.

"Well, I suppose I 've got to suffer in silence, if you say so, Eustace," she observed resignedly. "But it 's as bad as if we kept a shop."

But as the mouthpiece of Mr. Samson, she would be better equipped. It could be made to appear to Jakes that remonstrances were in the air and that there was a danger of losing Samson and Ford, and he would have to give ground. Mrs. Jakes thought well of the prospects of her enterprise now. She would have been alarmed and astonished if any responsible person had called her spiteful and unscrupulous, for she knew she was neither of these things. She was merely creeping under obstacles that she could not climb over, going to work with such means as came to her hand to secure an entirely worthy end. She knew her own mind, in short, and if it had wavered in its purpose, she would have known it no longer.

Margaret, all unconscious of the ingenuity that spent itself upon her, ate a leisurely breakfast, giving Mr. Samson ample time to escape to the stoep alone and establish himself there. She did n't at all mind being

left alone with Mrs. Jakes. That lady's stiffness and the facial expressions which she tried on, one after the other, in an endeavor to make her countenance match her mind, could be made ineffective by the simple process of ignoring them and her together. By dint of preserving a seeming of contented tranquillity and speaking not one word, it was possible to abash poor Mrs. Jakes utterly and leave her writhing in impotence behind her full-bodied urn. This was the method that commended itself to Margaret and which she employed successfully. Everybody should have a cut at her, she had decided; she would not baulk one of them of the privilege; but Mrs. Jakes had had her turn, and could not be permitted to cut and come again.

There were several remarks that Mrs. Jakes might have made with effect, but none of them occurred to her till Margaret had left the room, departing with an infuriating rustle of silk linings. Mrs. Jakes moved in her chair to see her cross the hall and go out. A look of calculation overspread her sour little face.

"I didn't notice the silk in *that* one," she murmured thoughtfully.

Mr. Samson, with a comparatively recent weekly edition of the *Cape Times* to occupy him did not notice her rubber-soled approach till her shadow fell on the page he was reading. He looked up sharply.

"Ah, Miss Harding," he said weakly.

She leaned with her back against the rail, looking down at him in his basket chair, half-smiling.

"You want to speak to me, don't you?" she asked.

Mr. Samson did not understand. "Do I?" he said. "Did I say so? I wonder what it was."

"You didn't say so," Margaret answered. "But I

know you do. You would n't send me finally to Coventry without saying anything at all, would you?"

"Ah!" He made a weary gesture with one hand, as though he would put the subject from him. "But —but I 'm not sending you to Coventry, my—Miss Harding, I mean. Don't think it, for a moment."

He shook his white head with a touch of sadness, looking up at her slender, civilized figure as she stood before him with a gaze that granted in advance every claim she could make on his consideration and forbearance.

"You know what I mean," said Margaret steadily.

"Do I though? Well, yes, I suppose I do," he said. "No use fumbling with it, is there? And you 're not the fumbling kind. Each of us knows what the other means all right, so what 's the use of talking about it?"

Margaret would not let him off; she did not desire that he should spare her and could see no reason for sparing him.

"I want to talk about it, this once," she answered. "You won't have many more chances to tell me what you think of me. I know, of course; but I was n't going to shirk it. I 've disappointed you, have n't I?"

"I don't say so," he replied, with careful gentleness. "I don't say anything of the kind, Miss Harding. You took your own line as you 'd every right to do. If I had—sort of—imagined you were different, you 're not to blame for my mistake. God knows I don't set up for an example to young ladies. Not my line at all, that sort of thing."

"Nothing to say, then?" queried Margaret. He

shook his head again. "You know," she added, "I 'm not a bit ashamed—not of anything."

"Of course you 're not," he agreed readily. "You did what you thought was right."

"But you don't think so?" she persisted.

"Miss Harding," replied Mr. Samson; "so far as I can manage it, I don't think about the matter at all."

Margaret had a queer impulse to reply to this by bursting into tears or laughter, whichever should offer itself, but at that moment Mrs. Jakes came out, and restrained a too obvious surprise at the sight of the pair of them in conversation. Circumstances were forever lying in ambush against Mrs. Jakes and deepening the mystery of life by their unexpected poppings up.

She addressed Mr. Samson and pointedly ignored Margaret.

"Mr. Ford could see you now, if you cared to go up," she announced.

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Samson, with alacrity.

Margaret spoke, smiling openly at Mrs. Jakes' irreconcilable side-face.

"Oh, would you mind if I went first?" she asked. "I rather want to see him."

"By all means," agreed Mr. Samson, with the same alacrity. "I 'm not perishin' to inspect him, you know. Tell him I 'll look him up afterwards."

Mrs. Jakes turned a fine bright red, and swallowed two or three times. She had matured a plan for declaring that Ford must not be disturbed again after Mr. Samson's visit, and she was fairly sure that Mar-

garet had suspected it. She watched the girl's departure with angry and baffled eyes.

"She 's doing it on purpose," was her thought. "She swings them like that so as to make me hear the frow-frow."

Ford was propped against pillows in his bed, with most of the books in the house piled alongside of him on chairs and a bedside table. He was expecting Mr. Samson and sang out a hearty, "Come in; don't stand drumming there," at Margaret's rap on the door.

"It 's me," announced Margaret, pushing it open; "not Mr. Samson. He 'll look you up afterwards. Do you mind?"

He flushed warmly, staring at her unexpected appearance.

"Of course I don't mind," he said. "It 's awfully good of you. If you 'd shove these books off on the floor, I could offer you a chair."

Margaret did as he suggested, but rose again at once and set the door wide open.

"The proprieties," she remarked, as she returned to her seat. "Also Mrs. Jakes. That keyhole might tempt her beyond her strength."

The room was a large one, with a window to the south full of sunshine and commanding nothing but the eternal unchanging levels of the Karoo and the hard sky rising from its edge. Its walls were rainbow-hued with unframed canvasses clustering upon them, exemplifying Ford's art and challenging the view through the window. She liked vaguely the spareness of the chamber's equipment and its suggestions of uncompromising masculinity. The row of boots and shoes, with trees distributed among the chief of them, the leather

trunks against the wall, the photographs about the dressing table, and the iron bath propped on end under the window,—these trifles seemed all to corroborate the impression she had of their owner. They were so consistent with the Ford she knew, units in the sum of him.

"Well," she said, looking at him frankly; "are we going to talk or just exchange civilities?"

"We won't do that," he answered, meeting her look. "Civilities be blowed, anyhow."

"But I 'd like to ask you how you feel, first of all," said Margaret.

"Oh, first-rate. I 'd get up if it was n't for Jakes," he assured her eagerly. "And I say," he added, with a quick touch of awkwardness, "I hope, really, you have n't been bothering about me, and thinking it was that affair in the drawing-room that made the trouble. Because it was n't, you know. I 'd felt something of the kind coming on before lunch. Jakes says that running up stairs may have done it—thing I 'm always forgetting I must n't do. A chap can't always be thinking of his in'ards, can he?"

"No," agreed Margaret.

She recognized a certain tone of politeness, of civil constraint, in his manner of speaking. He was doing his best to be trivial and ordinary, but she could not be deceived.

"It was rotten, though," he went on quickly. "That brute Van Zyl—look here! I 'm most fearfully sorry I was n't able to put a stop to his talk, Miss Harding. It makes me sick to think of you being badgered by that fellow."

"It did n't hurt me," said Margaret thoughtfully.

"All that is nothing. But are n't we being rather civil, after all?"

He made a slight grimace. He looked very frail against the pillows, with his nervous, sun-tanned hands fidgeting on the coverlet. One button of his pyjamas was loose at the throat, and let his lean neck be seen, with the tan stopping short where the collar came and giving place to white skin below.

"Oh, well," he said, in feeble protest. "Why bother?"

"I thought you 'd want to," replied Margaret. "I don't expect you to—to approve, but I did rely on your bothering about it all a little. But if you 'd rather not, that ends the matter."

"I did n't mean it like that," he said.

"Tell me," demanded Margaret; "don't you think I owe you an explanation?"

He considered her gravely for some seconds.

"Yes," he answered finally. "I think you ought to tell me about it."

"I 'm willing to," she said earnestly. "Oh, I wanted to often and often before. But I had to be careful. This Kafir is in danger of arrest by Mr. Van Zyl, and though he could easily clear himself before a court, you know what it means for a native to be arrested by him. He 'takes the kick out of them.' So I was n't really free to speak."

"Perhaps you were n't," granted Ford. "But you were free to keep away from him, and from niggers in general—were n't you?"

"Quite," agreed Margaret. "It is n't niggers in general, though—it 's just this one."

She leaned forward, with both elbows on the edge

of the bed and her fingers intertwined. She felt that the color had mounted in her face, but she was sedulous to keep her eyes on his.

"He 's a nigger—yes," she said; "black as your hat, and all that. But there 's a difference. This—nigger—I hate that word—was taken away when he was six years old and brought up in England. He was properly educated and he 's a doctor, a real doctor with diplomas and degrees, and he 's come out here to try and help his own people. As yet, he can't even speak Kafir, and he 's had a fearful time ever since he landed. Talking to him is just like talking to any one else. He 's read books and knows a bit about art, and all that; and he 's ever so humble and grateful for just a few words of talk. He 's out there in the veld, all day and all night, lonely and hunted. Of course I spoke to him and was as friendly as I could be. Don't you see, Mr. Ford? Don't you see?"

He nodded impartially.

"Yes, I see," he answered. "Well?"

"Well, that 's all," said Margaret. "Oh, yes—you mean the—the kiss? That was absolutely nothing. I used to make him talk and he 'd been telling me about how hard it was to make a start with his work, and how grateful he was to me for listening to him, and I said there was no need to be so grateful, and that it was a noble thing he had undertaken and that—yes—that I 'd always be proud I 'd been a friend of his. I held out my hand as I was saying this, and instead of shaking it, he kissed it."

"That was what the blackmailer saw, was it?" asked Ford. Margaret nodded. "By the way, who paid him?"

"*He* did," Margaret answered. "I would n't have paid a penny. He insisted on paying."

She was watching him anxiously. He was frowning in deep thought. She felt her heart beat more rapidly as he remained for a time without answering.

"It was worth paying for, if the fellow had kept faith," he said at last. "The whole thing 's in that —you don't know what such a secret is worth. It 's the one thing that binds people together out here, Dutch and English, colonials and Transvaalers and all the rest—the color line. But you did n't know."

"Oh, yes," Margaret made haste to correct him. "I did know. But I did n't care and I don't care now. I 'm not going to take that kind of thing into account at all. I won't be bullied by any amount of prejudices."

"It is n't prejudice," said Ford wearily. "Still— we can't go into all that. I 'm glad you explained to me, though."

"You 're wondering still about something," Margaret said. She could read the doubt and hesitation that he strove to hide from her. "Do let 's have the whole thing out. What is it?"

He had half-closed his eyes but now he opened them and surveyed her keenly.

"You 've told me how reasonable the whole thing was," he said, in deliberate tones. "It *was* reasonable. That part of it 's as right as it can be. I understand the picturesqueness of it all and the sadness; it *is* a sad business. I could understand your connection with it, too, in spite of the man's hiding from the police, if only he was n't a nigger. Beg pardon—a negro."

Margaret was following his words intently.

"What has that got to do with it?" she asked.

"You don't see it?" inquired Ford. "Didn't you find it rather awful, being alone with him? Didn't it make you creepy when he touched your hand?"

He was curious about it, apart from her share in the matter. He was interested in the impersonal aspect of the question as well.

"I didn't like his face, at first," admitted Margaret.

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards I didn't mind it," she replied. "I 'd got used to it, you see."

He nodded. Upon her answer he had dropped his eyes and was no longer looking at her.

"Well, that 's all," he said. "Don't trouble about it any more. You 've explained and—if you care to know—I 'm quite satisfied."

Margaret sat slowly upright.

"No, you 're not," she answered. "That is n't true; you 're not satisfied. You 're disappointed that I didn't shrink from him and feel nervous of him. You are—you are! I 'm not as good as you thought I was, and you 're disappointed. Why don't you say so? What 's the use of pretending like this?"

Ford wriggled between the sheets irritably.

"You 're making a row," he said. "They 'll hear you downstairs."

Margaret had risen and was standing by her chair.

"I don't care," she said, lowering her voice at the same time. "But why are n't you honest with me? You say you 're satisfied and all the time you 're thinking: 'A nigger is as good as a white man to her.'"

"I 'm not," protested Ford vigorously.

"I *did n't* shrink," said Margaret. "My flesh did n't.

crawl once. When I shake his hand, it feels just the same as yours. That disgusts you—I know. There 's something wanting in me that you thought was there. Mrs. Jakes has got it; her flesh can crawl like a caterpillar; but I have n't. You did n't know that when you asked me not to go away, did you?"

"Sit down," begged Ford. "Sit down and let me ask you again."

"No," said Margaret. "You shan't overlook things like that. I 'm going—going away from here as soon as I can. I 'm not ashamed and I won't be indulged."

She walked towards the door. There was a need to get away before the tears that made her eyes smart should overflow and expose themselves.

"Come back," cried Ford. "I say—give a fellow a chance. Come back. I want to say something."

She would not answer him without facing him, even though it revealed the tears.

"I 'm not coming," she replied, and went out.

She had fulfilled her purpose; they had all had their cut at her, save Dr. Jakes, who would not take his turn, and Mrs. Jakes, to whom that privilege was not due. Only one of them had swung the whip effectually and left a wheal whose smart endured.

Mrs. Jakes did not count on being left out of the festival. Her rod was in pickle. She was on hand when the girl came out of her room, serene again and ready to meet any number of Mrs. Jakeses.

"Oh, Miss Harding."

Mrs. Jakes arrested her, glancing about to see that the corridor was empty.

"The doctor wishes me to tell you," said Mrs. Jakes, aiming her words at the girl's high tranquillity, "that

he considers you had better make arrangements to remove to some other establishment. You understand, of course?''

''Of course,'' agreed Margaret.

''A month's notice, then,'' said Mrs. Jakes smoothly. ''That is usual. But if it should be convenient for you to go before, the doctor will be happy to meet you.''

''Very good of the doctor,'' smiled Margaret, and walked on, her skirts rustling.

CHAPTER XVI

VOICES below the window of her room that alternated briskly and yet guardedly, drew Margaret to look out. On the stoep beneath her, Fat Mary was exchanging badinage of the most elementary character with a dusty trooper of the Mounted Police, who stood on the ground under the railing with his bridle looped over his arm and his horse awaiting his pleasure at his elbow. Seen from above, the main feature of Fat Mary was her red-and-yellow headkerchief tied tightly over her large and globular skull, presenting the appearance of a strikingly-colored bubble at the summit of her person.

"You savvy tickle?" the trooper was saying. "By'-mby I come up there and tickle you. You like that plenty."

Fat Mary giggled richly. "You lie," she returned, with immense enjoyment.

"Tickle do you good," rejoined the trooper.

He was a tall lathy man, with the face of a tired Punchinello, all nose and chin with a thin fastidious mouth hidden between. His eyes wandered restlessly while he talked as though in search of better matter for his interest; and he chaffed the stout Kafir woman with a mechanical ease suggesting that this was a trick he had practised till it performed itself. The tight-fitting blue uniform, in spite of the dust that was thick upon it, and all his accoutrement of a horseman, lent a dandi-

fied touch to his negligent attitude; and he looked like—what he probably was—one of those gentlemen of sporting proclivities in whom the process of decay is arrested by the preservative discipline and toil of service in a Colonial force.

Margaret, examining him unseen from above, with hatpins in her hands, found his miserable and well-bred face at once repellent and distantly terrible; he seemed to typify so completely what she had learned to fear in the police, a humanity at once weak and implacable. His spurs, his revolver, his authority were means of inflicting pain given into feeble hands to supply the place of power. Within a few days she had come to know the dread which the street-hawker in the gutter feels for the policeman on the pavement who can destroy him when he chooses. It did not call for much imagination to see how dreadful the bored perfunctory man below might become when once he had fastened on his quarry and had it to himself to exercise upon it the arts of which the revolver and the rest were the appliances.

His presence under her window was a sign that the search for Kamis' hiding-place was still going forward. At any hour of the day now the inmates of the Sanatorium might lift up their eyes to see the unusual phenomenon of a human being sharing with them the solitude and the silence. Van Zyl had high hopes of laying his hands on the mysterious Kafir who had committed the crime of being incomprehensible to nervous kraals, whose occupants had a way of shaking off wonder and alarm by taking exercise with their weapons among the cattle of their neighbors. The Sanatorium, under his orders, was being watched for any indications of messages passing between Margaret and the Kafir, and the

dusty, armed men came and went continually, a succession of drilled shoulders, tanned, unconcerned faces, and expressionless eyes puckered against the sun's stare.

Their chief effect was to keep Margaret in a state of anxious fear lest their search should be successful, and she should be a witness of their return, riding past at the walk with a handcuffed figure trudging helplessly before them. She saw in painful dreams the dust that rose about them cloudily and the prisoner's bowed back as he labored to maintain the pace. The worst of the dreams followed their progress to a moment when the man on foot flagged, or perhaps fell, and one of the riders pressed forward with a foot disengaged from its stirrup and the spur lifted to rowel him to livelier efforts. Such was the fruit of Van Zyl's pregnant word when he spoke of prisoners who had had "the kick taken out of them."

She had had no opportunity of seeing Paul, to send through him a warning message to Kamis, since her interview with Van Zyl; but on this day she had glimpsed him from the stoep, as he moved about among the farm buildings, and she lost no time in preparing to go to him. She was putting on her hat as she watched the trooper and Fat Mary.

The couple of them were still at work upon their flirtation when she came out of the Sanatorium and descended the steps. The man's wandering eyes settled on her at once with grateful interest, and followed her as she went across to the path at a pace suited to the ardor of the sun. His Punchinello features brightened almost hopefully.

Fat Mary, observing the direction of his gaze, giggled afresh and gave information in a whisper.

"What—her? That lady there?"

Fat Mary nodded corroboratively. The trooper swore softly in mere amazement.

"You 're sure that 's her?" he demanded. "Well, I 'm—"

He stared at Margaret's receding back with a frown of perplexity, then drew the reins over his horse's head and prepared to mount.

"You go now?" asked Fat Mary, disappointed at the effect of her news.

"You bet," was the answer, as he swung up into the saddle and moved his horse on.

Margaret turned as the sound of hoofs padding on the dust approached from behind and was met by a salute and bold avaricious eyes above the drooping beak. He reined up beside her, looking down from the height of his saddle at her.

"Miss Harding, is n't it?" he said. "May I ask where you 're goin'?"

There was jocular invitation in his manner of saying it, the gallantry of a man who despises women.

"I 'm going to the farm, there," Margaret answered. The unexpected encounter had made her nervous, and she found herself ill at ease under his regard. "Why?"

"Because I 'll ask you for the pleasure of accompanyin' you so far, if you don't mind," he returned. "I want a look at the happy man you 're goin' to see. Hope you don't object?"

"I can't stop you," replied Margaret. "You will do as you please, of course."

She turned and walked on, careful not to hurry her steps. The trooper rode at her side, and though she

did not look up, she felt his eyes resting on her profile as they went.

"Bit slow, livin' out here, Miss Harding," he remarked, after they had gone for a minute or so in silence. "Not what you 've been use to, I imagine. Found yourself rather short of men, did n't you?"

"No," replied Margaret thoughtfully; "no."

"Oh, come now." The mounted man laughed thinly, failing utterly to get his tolerant and good-natured effect. "If you 'd had a supply of decent chaps to do the right thing by a girl as pretty as you—admire you, an' flirt, and all that, I mean—you would n't have fallen back on this nigger we 're lookin' for, would you, now?"

This was what it meant, then, to have one's name linked with that of a Kafir. She was anybody's game; not the lowest need look upon her as inaccessible. She had to put a restraint upon herself to keep from quickening her pace, from breaking into a run and fleeing desperately from the man whose gaze never left her. Its persistence, though she was aware of it without seeing it, was an oppression; she imagined she could detect the taint of his breath blowing hot upon her as she walked.

He saw the flush that rose in her cheek, and laughed again.

"You need n't answer," he said. "I can see for myself I 'm right. Lord, whenever was I wrong when it came to spottin' a girl's feelings? Say, Miss Harding —did n't I hit it first shot? Of course I did.

"Of course I did," he repeated two or three times, congratulating himself. "Trust *me*.

"I say," he began again presently. "This little

meetin'—I hope it 's not goin' to be the last. I expect you 've learnt by now that niggers have their drawbacks, and it is n't a safe game for you to play. People simply won't stand it, you know. Now, what you want is a friend who 'll stand by you and show you how to make the row blow over. With savvy and a touch of tact, it can be done. Now, Miss Harding—I don't know your Christian name, but I fancy we could understand each other if you 'd only look up and smile."

The farm was not far now. Paul had seen them coming and was standing at gaze to watch them approach, with that appearance of absorbed interest which almost anything could bring out. Soon he must see, he could not fail to see, that she was in distress and needing aid, and then he would come forward to meet them.

"No?" the trooper inquired, cajolingly. "Come now —one smile. No? No?"

He waited for an answer.

"I would n't try the haughty style," he said then. "Lord, no. You would n't find it pay. After the nigger business, haughtiness is off. What I 'm offering you is more than most chaps would offer; it is n't everybody 'll put on a nigger's boots, not by a long sight. Now, we don't want to be nasty about it, do we? One smile, or just a word to say we understand each other, and it 'll be all right."

It was insupportable, but now Paul was coming towards them, shyly and not very fast.

"Who 's this kid?" demanded the trooper. "Quick, now, before he 's here. Look up, or he 'll smell a rat."

Margaret raised her eyes to his slowly, cold fear and disgust mingling in her mind. He met her with a smile in which relief was the salient character.

"When Mr. Van Zyl hears how you have insulted me," she began trembling.

"Eh?" He stared at her suspiciously. "Van Zyl?" He seemed suddenly enlightened. "I say, I could n't tell you 'd—you 'd made your arrangements. Could I, now? I would n't have dreamed—look here, Miss Harding; I 'm awfully sorry. Could n't we agree to forget all this? You can't blame a chap for trying his luck."

She did not entirely understand; she merely knew that what he said must be monstrous. No clean thing could issue from that hungry, fastidious mouth. She walked on, leaving him halted and staring after her, perturbed and apprehensive. His patient horse stood motionless with stretched neck; he sat in the saddle erect as to the body, with the easy secure seat which drill had made natural to him, but with the Punchinello face drooped forward, watching her as she went. He saw her meet Paul, saw the pair of them glance towards him and then turn their backs and walk down to the farm together. Pain, defeat and patience expressed themselves in his countenance, as in that of an ignoble Prometheus. Presently he pulled up the docile horse's head with a jerk of the bridoon.

"My luck," he said aloud, and swung his horse about.

Paul had not time to question Margaret as to her trouble, for she spoke before he could frame his slow words.

"Paul," she cried, "I want to speak to you. But—oh, can I sit down somewhere? I feel—I feel—I must sit down."

She looked over her shoulder nervously, and Paul's glance followed.

"Is it him?" he inquired. "Sit here. I 'll go to him."

"No," she said vehemently. "Don't. You must n't. Let 's go to your house. I want to sit down indoors."

Her senses were jangled; she felt a need of relief from the empty immensity of sun and earth that surrounded her.

"Come on," said Paul. "We 'll go in."

He did not offer her his arm; it was a trick he had yet to learn. He walked at her side between the kraals, and brought her to the little parlor which housed and was glorified by Mrs. du Preez's six rosewood chairs, upholstered in velvet, sofa to match, rosewood center-table and the other furniture of the shrine. He looked at her helplessly as she sank to a seat on the "sofa to match."

"You want some water," he said, with an inspiration, and vanished.

Margaret had time somewhat to recover herself before he returned with his mother and the water.

Mrs. du Preez needed no explanations.

"Now you 'll have a bit of respect for our sun, Miss Harding," she said, after a single, narrow-eyed look at the girl. "Hand that water here, Paul; you did n't bring it for show, did you? Well, then. And just you let me take off this hat, Miss Harding. Bond Street, I 'll bet a pound. They don't build for this sun in Bond Street. Now jus' let me wet this handkerchief and lay it on your forehead. Now, ain't that better?"

She turned her head to drive a fierce whisper at Paul.

"Get out o' this. Come in by an' by."

"Thanks awfully." Margaret shivered as the dripping handkerchief pressed upon her brow let loose drops

that gravitated to her neck and zigzagged under the collar of her blouse. "I 'm feeling much better now. I 'd rather sit up, really."

"So long as you have n't got that tight feeling," conceded Mrs. du Preez.

She stood off, watching the girl in a manner that expressed something striving within her mind.

"All right now?" she asked, when Margaret had got rid of the wet handkerchief.

"Quite," Margaret assured her. "Thanks ever so much."

Mrs. du Preez arranged the glass and jug neatly upon the iron tray on which they had made their appearance.

"Miss Harding," she said suddenly. "I know."

"Oh? What do you know?" inquired Margaret.

Mrs. du Preez glanced round to see that Paul had obeyed her.

"I know all about it," she answered, with reassuring frowns and nods. "Your Fat Mary told my Christian Kafir and she told me. About—about Kamis; *you* know."

"I see."

The story had the spreading quality of the plague; it was an infection that tainted every ear, it seemed.

"You mean—you 'd like me to go?" suggested Margaret.

"No! *No!* NO!"

Mrs. du Preez brought both hands into play to aid her face in making the negatives emphatic. "Go? Why, if it was n't for the mercy of God I 'd be in the same box myself. I would—Me! I 've got nothing to come the heavy about, even if I was the sort that would do it. So now you know."

"I don't understand," said Margaret. "Do you mean that you—?"

"I mean," interrupted Mrs. du Preez, "that if it was n't for that Kafir I 'd ha' been hopping in hell before now; and if people only knew it—gosh! I 'd have to hide. I wanted to tell you so 's you should know there was some one that could n't throw any stones at you. You 're beginnin' to find things rather warm up there, are n't you?"

Margaret smiled. The true kindness of Mrs. du Preez's intention moved her; charity in this quarter was the last thing she had expected to find.

"A little warm," she agreed. "Everybody 's rather shocked just now, and Mrs. Jakes has given me notice to leave."

"*Has* she?" demanded Mrs. du Preez. "Well, I suppose it was to be expected. I 've known that woman now for more years than I could count on my fingers, and I 've always had my doubts of her. She 's no more got the spirit of a real lady than a cow has. That 's where it is, Miss Harding. She can't understand that a lady 's got to be trusted. For two pins I 'd tell her so, the old cross-eyed *skellpot*. So you 're going? Well, you won't be sorry."

"But—how did you come across Kamis?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, it 's a long story. I was clearin' out of here—doing a bolt, you know, an' I got into trouble with a feller that was with me. It was a feller named Bailey that was stoppin' here," explained Mrs. du Preez, who had not heard the whole history of Margaret's exposure. "He was after a bit of money I 'd got with me, and he

was startin' in to kick me when up jumps that nigger and down goes Bailey. See?''

Margaret saw only vaguely, but she nodded.

''That 's Bailey,'' said Mrs. du Preez, drawing her attention to the Boy's photograph. ''Christian warned me against smashing it when I wanted to. He 's got notions, Christian has. 'Leave it alone,' he says; 'we 're not *afraid* of it.' So of course I had to; but I 'd be more 'n a bit thankful if it was gone. I can't take any pleasure in the room with it there.''

''I could help you in that, perhaps,'' suggested Margaret. ''You 've helped me. It was sweet of you to tell me what you did, the friendliest thing I ever knew.''

''I 'd rather you did n't speak about it to Christian,'' objected Mrs. du Preez.

''I did n't mean to,'' Margaret assured her, rising.

She crossed to the narrow mantel as though to look more particularly at Boy Bailey's features. She lifted the plush frame from its place.

''There are people who would call this face handsome,'' she remarked.

''Heaps,'' agreed Mrs. du Preez. ''In his best days, he 'd got a style—Lord! Miss Harding.''

Margaret had let the photograph fall face-downwards on the edge of the fender and the crash of its glass cut Mrs. du Preez short. She stared at Margaret in astonishment as the girl put a foot on the picture and broke it.

''Was n't that clumsy of me?'' she asked, smiling.

''Well, of all the cheek,'' declared Mrs. du Preez, slowly. ''I never guessed what you were after. But I don't know what Christian will say.''

''He can't mend it, anyhow,'' replied Margaret. ''You did want it gone, did n't you?''

"You bet," said Mrs. du Preez. "But—but that was a dodge. Here, let 's make sure of it while we 're at it; those two pieces could be easily stuck together. I 'll stamp some of that smashed glass into it. Still—I should think, after this, you 'd be able to hold your own with Mrs. Jakes."

She kicked the pieces of the now unrepairable photograph into a little heap.

"I 'll leave it like that for Christian to see," she said. "But, look here. Did n't you want to speak to Paul? You 'll be wondering when I 'm goin' to give you a chance. I 'll just tap the drum for him."

Paul's whistle from behind the house answered the first strokes and Mrs. du Preez, with an unusual delicacy, did not return to the parlor with him.

"You 're all right now?" he asked, as he entered.

"Oh, yes. That was nothing," said Margaret.

Paul took his stand by the window, leaning with a shoulder against it, looking abstractedly at her face, and waiting to hear her speak.

"Paul," asked Margaret, "do you know where Kamis is now?"

"Yes," he said.

"Do you see him? Can you speak to him for me?"

"I don't see him much now," answered Paul. "That is because the policemen are riding about looking for him. But I can speak to him to-night."

"He must take care not to be caught," said Margaret. "They 're very anxious to find him just now. You 've heard, Paul, that they 've found out about me and him?"

"Ye–es," answered Paul. "I heard something."

"It 's true," said Margaret. "So I 've got to go away from here. They won't have me at the Sanatorium any

longer and the police are watching to see if Kamis comes anywhere near me and to catch him if he does. You must warn him to keep right away, Paul. He must n't send any messages, even."

"I will tell him," said Paul. "But—you are going away? To England?"

"Perhaps," replied Margaret. "I expect I shall have to now. They tell me that people won't let me live in South Africa any more. I 'm a sort of leper, and I must keep my distance from healthy people. So we shan't see each other again after a few more days. Are you sorry, Paul?"

He reddened boyishly and fidgeted.

"Oh, it is best for you to go," he answered, uncomfortably.

"Paul! But why?"

"It 's—it 's not your place," he said, facing the difficulty of putting an elusive thought into words. "This country—people don't know what 's good and what 's bad—and there is n't enough people. Not like London. You should go to London again. Kamis was telling me—theaters and streets and pictures to see, and people everywhere. He says one end of London is just like you and the other end is like that Bailey. That is where you should go—London, not here. I will go to London soon, too."

"I see," said Margaret. "I was afraid at first that you were sick of me too, Paul. I need n't have been afraid of that, need I? Would n't it be fine if we could meet in London?"

"We can," said Paul seriously. "I have got a hundred and three pounds, and I will go."

"That 's a good deal," said Margaret.

"It 's a lot," he agreed. "My father gave it to me the other day, all tied up tight in a little dirty bundle, and there was my mother's marriage lines in it too. He said he did n't mean me to have those but the money was for me. It was on the table in the morning and he rolled it over to me and said: 'Here, Paul. Take this and don't bring any more of your tramps in the house.' That was because I brought that Bailey here, you know. So now—soon—I will go to London and Paris and make models there. Kamis says—"

"What?" asked Margaret.

"He says I will think my eyes have gone mad at first when I see London. He says that coming to Waterloo Station will be like dying and waking in another world. But he says too—blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God even in Waterloo Station."

"He ought to go back himself," said Margaret, with conviction. "He 's wasted here."

"Will you see him before you go?" asked Paul.

"No," said Margaret. "No; I dare n't. Tell him, Paul, please, that I 'd like to see him ever so much, but that it 's too dangerous. Say I wish him well with all my heart, and that I hope most earnestly that he won't let himself be caught."

"He won't," said Paul, with confidence. "But I 'll tell him."

"And say," continued Margaret—"say he 's not to feel sorry about what has happened to me. Tell him I 'm still proud that I was his friend, and that all this row is worth it. Can you remember all that?"

Paul nodded. "I can remember," he assured her.

"It is—it is so fine to hear, for me, too. I won't forget anything."

"Please don't, if you can help it. I want him to have that message," said Margaret. "And now, Paul, I 'll have to say good-by to you, because I shan't come here again."

Paul stood upright as she rose. His slow smile was very friendly.

"It does n't matter," he said. "You are going to London, and soon I shall see you there."

"I wonder," she said, giving him her hand. "I 'll write you my address and send it you before I leave, Paul."

"I should find you anyhow," he assured her confidently.

Mrs. du Preez, also, had to be taken leave of, and shed a tear or so at the last. In her, a strong emotion found a safety valve in ferocity.

"As for that Jakes woman," she said, in conclusion, "you tell her from me, Miss Harding—from *me,* mind, —that it would n't cost me any pain to hand her a slap acrost the mug."

Margaret went homeward through the late light dreamily. Far away, blurred by the sun's horizontal rays, the figure of the trooper occupied the empty distance, no larger than an ant against the flushed sky. Peace and melancholy were in the mood of the hour, a cue to lead her thoughts towards sadness. It caused her to realize that she would not leave it all without a sense of loss. She would miss its immensity, its effect of setting one at large on an earth without trimmings under a heaven without clouds, to make the most of one's own humanity. It would be a thing she had

known in part, but which henceforth she would never know even as she herself was known. She could never now find the word that expressed its wonder and its appeal.

Mr. Samson was on the stoep as she went up the steps to enter the Sanatorium. He put down his paper and toddled forward to open the door for her, anxiously punctilious.

"Ford was down for tea," he said. "Askin' for you, he was."

"Oh, was he?" replied Margaret inanely, and went in.

At supper that evening in the farmhouse kitchen, Christian du Preez, glancing up from the food which occupied him, observed by a certain frowning deliberation on Paul's face, that his son was about to deliver himself in speech.

"Well, what is it, Paul?" he inquired encouragingly.

Paul looked up with a faint surprise at having his purpose thus forecasted.

"That money," he said doubtfully.

"Oh." The Boer glanced uneasily at his wife, who laid down her knife and fork and began to listen with startled interest.

"That 's all right," said Christian. "Do what you like with it. Go to the dorp and spend it; it 's yours. Now eat your supper."

"I am going to London," said Paul then, seriously, and having got it off his mind, said, heard and done with, he resumed his meal with an appetite.

"London," echoed the Boer. "London?" exclaimed Mrs. du Preez.

"Yes," said Paul. "To make models. Here there is nobody to see them."

"He is gone mad," said the Boer with conviction. "He has been queer for a long time and now he is mad. Paul, you are mad."

"Am I?" asked Paul respectfully, and continued to eat.

His father and mother had much to say, agitatedly, angrily, persuasively, but people were always saying things to him that had no real meaning. It was ridiculous, for instance, that the Boer should call him a dumb fool because at the close of a lecture he should ask for more coffee. He was n't dumb and did n't believe he was a fool. People were n't fools because they went to London; on the contrary, they had to be rather clever and enterprising to get there at all. And at the back of his mind dwelt the thing he could not hope to convey and did not attempt to—a sense he had, which warmed and uplifted him, of nearing a goal after doubt and difficulty, the Pisgah exaltation and tenderness, the confidence that to him and to the work which his hands should perform, Canaan was reserved, virgin and welcoming. It was a strength he had in secret, and the Boer knew himself baffled when after an hour of exhortation to be sane and explanatory and obedient and comprehensible, he looked up and said, very thoughtfully:

"In London, people pay a shilling to look at clays, father."

CHAPTER XVII

FORD'S return to normal existence coincided with the arrival of mail-morning, when the breakfast menu was varied by home letters heaped upon the plates. Mrs. Jakes had one of her own this morning and was very conscious of it, affecting to find her correspondent's caligraphy hard to read. Old Mr. Samson had his usual pile and greeted him from behind a litter of torn wrappers and envelopes.

"Hullo, Ford," he cried, "up on your pins, again? Feelin' pretty bobbish—what?"

"Nice way you 've got of putting it," replied Ford, taking his seat before the three letters on his plate. "I 'm all right, though. You seem fairly well supplied with reading-matter this morning."

"The usual, the usual," said Mr. Samson airily. "People gone to the country; got time to write, don't you know. Here 's a feller tells me that the foxes down his way are simply rotten with mange."

"Awful," said Ford, glancing at the first of his own letters. "And here 's a feller tells *me* that he 's sent in the enclosed account nine times and must press for a cheque without delay. What 's the country coming to? Eh?"

"You be blowed," retorted Mr. Samson, and fell again to his reading.

From behind the urn Mrs. Jakes made noises indicative of lady-like exasperation.

"The way some people write, you 'd never believe they 'd been educated and finished regardless of expense," she declared. "There 's a word here—she 's telling me about a lady I used to know in Town—and whether she suffers from her children (though I never knew she was married) or from a chaplain, I can't make out. Can you see what it is, Mr. Ford? There, where I 'm pointing?"

"Oh, yes," said Ford. "It 's worse than you think, Mrs. Jakes. It 's chilblains."

"O-oh." Mrs. Jakes was enlightened. "Why, of course. I remember now. Even when she was a girl at school, she used to suffer dreadfully from them. I *thought* she could n't have been married, with such feet. But is n't it a dreadful way to write?"

She would have indulged them with further information regarding the lady who suffered, but Margaret's entrance drove her back behind the breastwork of the urn. She distrusted her own correctness when the girl's eyes were on her, and her sure belief that Margaret had revealed herself as anything but correct by every standard which Mrs. Jakes could apply, failed to reassure her.

"Good morning, Miss Harding," she said frostily. "You will take coffee?"

"Good morning," replied Margaret, passing to her place at the table. "Yes, it is lovely."

"Er—the coffee?" asked Mrs. Jakes, suspicious and uncomprehending.

"Oh, coffee. Yes, please," said Margaret. "I thought you said something about the weather."

Ford grinned at the letter he was reading and greeted her quietly.

"Glad you 're better," she replied, not returning his smile, and turned at once to the letters which awaited her.

He was watching her while she sorted them, examining first the envelopes for indications of what they held. One seemed to puzzle her, and she took it up to decipher the postmark. Then she set it down and opened the fattest of all, a worthy, linen-enveloped affair, containing a couple of typewritten sheets as well as a short letter. She read it perfunctorily and looked through the business-like typescripts impatiently, folded them all up again and tucked them back into the linen envelope. Then followed the others, and the one with the smudged postmark last of all. She scrutinized the outside of this again before she opened it; it was not an English letter, but one from some unidentifiable postal district in South Africa. At last she opened it, and drew out the dashing black scrawl which it harbored. A glance at the end of the letter seemed to leave her in the dark, and Ford saw her delicate brows knit as she began to read.

He found himself becoming absorbed in the mere contemplation of her. He was aware of a character in her presence at once familiar to him by long study and intangible; it had the quality of bloom, that a touch destroys. She had hair that coiled upon her head and left its shape discernible, and beneath it a certain breadth and frankness of brow upon which the eyebrows were etched marvelously. She was like a lantern which softens and tempers the impetuous flame within it, and turns its ardor into radiance. The Kafir and the shame and the imprudence of that affair did not suffice to darken that light; at the most, they could but

cause it to waver and make strange shadows for a moment, like the candle one carries, behind a guarding hand, through a windy corridor. It did not cool the strong flame that was the heart of the combination.

Suddenly Margaret laid the letter down. She put it back on her plate with an abrupt gesture and he noted that she had gone pale, and that her mouth was wry as though with a bitter taste. She even withdrew her fingers from the sheet with exactly the movement of one who has by accident set his hand on some unexpected piece of foulness.

She went on with her breakfast quietly enough, but she did not look at her letters again. They were perhaps the first letters in years to come to the Sanatorium and be dismissed with a single perusal.

"Fog in London," said Mr. Samson, suddenly. "Feller writes as though it was the plague. *He* does n't know what it is to have too much bally sun."

The glare that shone through the window returned his glance unwinking.

"Fog?" responded Mrs. Jakes, alertly. "That *is* bad. Such dreadful things happen in fogs. I remember a lady at Home, who was divorced afterwards, who lost her way in a fog and did n't get home for two days, and even then she had somebody else's umbrella and could no more remember where she 'd got it than fly. And she was so confused and upset that all she could say to her husband was: 'Ed,'—his name was Edwin—'Ed, did you remember to have your hair cut?' "

"Had he remembered?" demanded Mr. Samson.

"I think not," replied Mrs. Jakes. "What with the worry, and the things the servant said, I don't

believe he 'd thought of it. He always did wear it rather long."

"Think of that," said Mr. Samson, with solemn surprise.

Margaret finished her breakfast in silence and then gathered up her letters. Ford thought that as she picked up the sheet which had distressed her, she glanced involuntarily at him. But the look conveyed nothing and she departed in silence. He was careful not to follow her too soon.

It was not difficult to find her. For some two hours after breakfast was over, the only part of the Sanatorium which it was possible to inhabit with comfort was the stoep. The other rooms were given over to Fat Mary and her colleagues for the daily ceremony known as "doing the rooms," a festival involving excursions and alarms, skylarking, breakages and fights. To seek seclusion in the drawing-room, for example, was to be subjected to a cinematograph impression of surprised and shocked black faces peering round the door and vanishing, to scuffling noises on the mat and finally to hints from Mrs. Jakes herself: "*Would* you mind the girls just sweeping round your feet? They 're rather behindhand this morning."

Margaret had betaken herself and her chair to the extreme end of the stoep, beyond the radius of Ford's art and Mr. Samson's meditations. Her letters were in her lap, but she was not looking at them. She was gazing straight before her at the emptiness which stretched out endlessly, affording no perch for the eye to rest on, an everlasting enigma to baffle sore minds.

Ford was innocent of stratagem in his manner of approach.

"I say," he said, and she looked up listlessly. "I say—I 'm sorry. Can't we make it up?"

"All right," she answered.

He looked at her closely.

"But *is* it all right?" he persisted. "You 're hurt about something; I can see you are; so it 's not all right yet. Look here, Miss Harding: you were wrong about what I was thinking."

"Oh no." Margaret shifted in her chair with a tired impatience. "I was n't wrong," she answered. "I could see; and I think you should n't go back on it now. The least you can do is stand by your beliefs. You won't find yourself alone. I had a letter from some one this morning who would back you up to the last drop of his blood, I 'm sure."

"Who 's that?"

"I don't know," she answered. "It 's my first anonymous letter. Somebody has heard about me and therefore writes. He thinks just as you do. Would you like to see it?"

She handed him the bold, crowded scrawl and sat back while he leaned on the rail to read it.

At the second sentence in the letter he looked up sharply and restrained an ejaculation. She was not looking at him, but a tinge of pink had risen in her quiet face.

It was an anonymous letter of the most villainous kind. Something like horror possessed him as he realized that her grave eyes had perused its gleeful and elaborate offense. The abominable thing was a vileness fished from the pit of a serious and blackguard mind. It had the baseness of ordure, and a sort of frivolity that transcended commonplace evil.

"I say," he cried, before the end of the ingenious thing was reached. "You have n't read this through?"

"Not quite," she answered.

"I—I should think not."

With quick nervous jerks of his fingers which betrayed the hot anger he felt, he tore the letter into strips and the strips again into smaller fragments, and strewed them forth upon the stiff dead shrubs below.

"It 's getting about, you see," said Margaret, with a sigh. "I suppose, before I manage to get away, I shall be accustomed to things of that kind."

"But this is awful," cried Ford. "I can't bear this. You, of all people, to have to go through all that this means and threatens—it 's awful. Miss Harding, let me apologize, let me grovel, let me do anything that 'll give you the feeling that I 'm with you in this. You can't face it alone—you simply can't. I'm sorry enough to—to kick myself. Can't you let me stand in with you?"

He stopped helplessly before Margaret's languid calm. She was not in the least stirred by his appeal. She lay back in her chair listlessly, and only withdrew her eyes from the veld to look at him as he ceased to speak.

"Oh, it does n't matter," she said indifferently. "It 's a silly business. Don't worry about it, please."

"But—" began Ford, and stopped. "You mean—you won't have me with you, anyhow?" he asked. "What you thought I thought, upstairs—you can't forget that? Is that it?"

She smiled slowly, and he stared at her in dismay. Nothing could have expressed so clearly as that faint

smile her immunity from the passion that stirred in him.

"Perhaps it 's that," she answered, always in the same indifferent, low voice. "I 'm not thinking more about it than I can help."

"I did n't think any harm of you," Ford protested earnestly, leaning forward from his perch on the rail and striving to compel her to look at him. "We 've been good friends, and you might have trusted me not to think evil of you. I simply did n't understand —nothing else. You can't seriously be offended because you imagined that I was thinking certain thoughts. It is n't fair."

"I 'm not offended," she answered.

"Hurt, then," he substituted. "Anything you please."

He stepped down from his seat and walked a few paces away, with his hands deeply sunk in his pockets, and then walked back again.

"I say," he said abruptly; "it 's a question of what I think of you, it seems. Let me tell you what I do think."

Margaret turned her face towards him. He was frowning heavily, with an appearance of injury and annoyance. He spoke in curt jets.

"It 's only since I 've known you that I 've really worried over being a lunger," he said. "The Army —I could stand that. But seeing you and talking to you, and knowing I 'd no right to say a word—no right to try and lead things that way, even, for your sake as much as mine—it 's been hard. Because—this is what I *do* think—it 's seemed to me that you were worth more than everything else. I 'd have given the

world to tell you so, and ask you—well, you know what I mean."

Margaret was not so steeped in sorrows but she could mark this evasion of a plain statement with amusement.

Ford, staring at her intently, clicked with impatience.

"Well, then," he said in the tone of one who is goaded to extreme lengths; "well then, Miss—er—Margaret—" he paused, seemingly struck by a pleasant flavor in the name as he spoke it—"Margaret," he repeated, less urgently; "I 'm hanged if I know how to say it, but—I love you."

There was an appreciable interval while they remained gazing at each other, he breathless and discomposed, she grave and unresponding.

"Do you?" she said at last. "But—"

"I do," he urged. "On my soul, I do. Margaret, it 's true. I 've been—loving—you for a long time. I thought perhaps you might care a little, too, sometimes, and I 'd have told you if it was n't for this chest of mine. That 's what I meant when you said you were going away and I asked you to stay. I thought you understood then."

"I did understand," she replied, and sat thoughtful.

She wondered vaguely at the apathy that mastered her and would not suffer her to feel even a thrill. Some virtue had departed out of her and drawn with it the whole liveliness of her mind and spirit, so that what remained was mere deadness. She knew, in some subconscious and uninspiring manner, that Ford was what he had always been, with passion added to him; he was waiting in a tension of suspense for her to answer, with his thin face eager and glowing. It

should have moved her with compassion and liking for the stubborn, faithful, upright soul she knew him to be. But the letter, the confident approaches of the Punchinello policeman, and even Mrs. Jakes' ill-restrained joy in bidding her leave the place, had been so many blows upon her function of susceptibility. The accumulation of them had a little stunned her, and she was not yet restored.

Ford saw her lips hesitate before she spoke, and his heart beat more quickly.

She looked up at him uncertainly and made a movement with her shoulders like a shrug.

"Oh, I can't," she said suddenly. "No, I can't. It 's no use; you must leave me alone, please."

His look of sheer amazement, of pain and bewilderment, returned to her later. It was as though he had been struck in the face by some one he counted on as a friend. He stood for an instant rooted.

"Sorry," he said, then. "I might have seen I was worrying you. Sorry."

His retreating feet sounded softly on the flags of the stoep, and she sank back in her chair, wondering wearily at the event and its inconsequent conclusion, with her eyes resting on the wide invitation of the veld.

"Am I going to be ill?" was the thought that came to her relief. "Am I going to be ill? I 'm not really like this."

The ordeal of lunch had to be faced; she could not eat, but still less could she face the prospect of Mrs. Jakes with a tray. Afterwards, there was the dreary labor of writing letters to go before her to England and make ready the way for her return. There

would have to be explanations of some kind, and it was a sure thing that her explanations would fail to satisfy a number of people who would consider themselves entitled to comment on her movements. There would have to be some mystery about it, at the best. For the present, she could not screw herself up to the task of composing euphemisms. "Expect me home by the boat after next. I will tell you why when I see you"; that had to suffice for the legal uncle, his lawful wife, the philosophic aunt and all the rest.

Then came tea and afterwards dinner; the day dragged like a sick snake. Dr. Jakes made mournful eyes at her and talked feverishly to cover his nervousness and compunction, and now and again he looked down the table at his wife and Mr. Samson with furtive malevolence. Afterwards, in the drawing-room, Mrs. Jakes, having made an inspection of the doctor, played the intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana" five times, and Ford and Samson spent the evening over a chessboard. Margaret, on the couch, found herself coming to the surface of the present again and again from depths of heavy and turgid thought, to find the intermezzo still limping along and Mr. Samson still apostrophizing his men in an undertone ("Take his bally bishop, old girl; help yourself. No, come back—he 'll have you with that knight"). It was interminable, a pocket eternity.

Then the view of the stairs sloping up to the dimness above and the cool air of the hall upon her neck and face, and the sourness of Mrs. Jakes trying to give her "good night" the intonation of an insult—these intruded abruptly upon her straying faculties, and she came a little dazed into the light of the candles in her

own room, where her eyes fell first on the breadth of Fat Mary's back, as that handmaid stood at the window with the blind in her hand and peered forth into the dark. As she turned, Margaret gained an impression that the stout woman's interest in something below was interrupted by her entrance.

Fat Mary had been another of Margaret's disappointments since the exposure. The Kafir woman's manner to her had undergone a notable change. There was no longer the touch of reverence and gentleness with which she had tended Margaret at first, which had made endearing all her huge incompetence and playfulness. There had succeeded to it a manner of familiarity which manifested itself chiefly in the roughness of her handling. Margaret was being called upon to pay the penalty which the African native exacts from the European who encroaches upon the aloofness of the colored peoples.

Fat Mary grinned as Margaret came through the door.

"Mo' stink," she observed, cheerfully, and pointed to the dressing-table.

Margaret's eyes followed the big black finger to where a bunch of aloe plumes lay between the candles on the white cloth, brilliantly red. The sight of them startled the girl sharply. She went across and raised them.

"Where did they come from?" she asked quickly.

"That Kafir," grinned Fat Mary. "Missis's Kafir, he bring 'im."

"What did he say? Did he give any message?"

"No," replied Fat Mary. "Jus' stink-flowers, an' give me Scotchman."

"Scotchman" is Kafir slang for a florin; it has for an origin a myth reflecting on the probity of a great race. But Margaret did not inquire; she was pondering a possible significance in this gift of bitter blooms.

Fat Mary eyed her acutely while she stood in thought.

"He say don't tell nobody," she remarked casually. "I say no fear—me! I don't tell. Missis like that Kafir plenty?"

"Mary," said Margaret. "You can go now. I shan't want you."

"All a-right," replied Fat Mary willingly, and took herself off forthwith. She had her own uses for a present of spare time at this season.

Margaret put the red flowers down as the door closed behind Fat Mary, and set herself before the mirror. There was still that haze between her thoughts and the realities about her, a drifting cloudiness that sometimes obscured them all together, and sometimes broke and let matters appear.

She noted in the mirror the strange, familiar specter of her own face, and saw that the hectic was strong and high on either cheek. Then the aloe plumes plucked at her thoughts, and the haze closed about her again, leaving her blind in a deep and aimless preoccupation in which her thoughts were no more than a pulse, repeating itself to no end. Ford's declaration and his manner of making it; the Punchinello countenance of the trooper, bestially insinuating; Mrs. Jakes eating soup at Mr. Samson;—these came and went in the dreadful arena of her mind and made a changing spectacle that baffled the march of the clock-hands.

She did not know how long she had been sitting

when a rattle at the window surprised her into looking up. She stared absently at the blind till it came again. It had the sound of some one throwing earth from below. She rose and went across and looked out.

It had not touched her nerves at all; it was not the kind of thing which could frighten her. The window was raised at the bottom and she kneeled on the floor and put her head, cloudily haloed with her loose hair, out to the star-tempered dark.

A whisper from below, where the whisperer stood invisible in the shadow at the foot of the wall, hailed her at once.

"Miss Harding," it said. "Miss Harding. I 'm here, directly below you."

She could see nothing.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Hush." She had spoken in her ordinary tones. "Not so loud. It 's dangerous."

"Who is it?" she asked again, subduing her voice.

"Why—Kamis, of course." The answer came in a tone of surprise. "You expected me, did n't you? Your light was burning."

"Expected you? No," said Margaret. "I did n't expect you; you ought n't to have come."

"But—" the voice was protesting; "my message. It was on the paper around the aloe plumes. I particularly told the fat Kafir woman to give you that, and she promised. If your light was burning, I 'd throw something up at your window, and if not, I 'd go away. That was it."

The night breeze came in at the tail of his words with a dry rustling of the dead vines.

"There was no paper," said Margaret.

The Kafir below uttered an angry exclamation which she did not catch.

"If only you don't mind," he said, then. "I got Paul's message from you and I had to try and see you."

"Yes," said Margaret. She could not see him at all; under the lee of the house the night was black, though at a hundred paces off she could make out the lie of the ground in the starlight. His whispering voice was akin to the night.

"Then you don't mind?" he urged.

"I don't mind, of course," said Margaret. "But it 's too risky."

Further along the stoep there was a dim warmish glow through the red curtains of the study and a leak of faint light under the closed front door. The house was loopholed for unfriendly eyes and ears. There was no security under that masked battery for their privacy. At any moment Mrs. Jakes might prick up her ears and stand intent and triumphant to hear their strained whispers in cautious interchange. Margaret shrank from the thought of it.

"I only want a word," answered Kamis from the darkness. "I may not see you again. You won't let me drop without a word—after everything?"

Margaret hesitated. "Some one may pick up that paper and read your message and watch to see what happens. I could n't bear any more trouble about it."

There was a pause.

"No," agreed Kamis, then. "No—of course. I did n't think of that. I 'll say good-by now, then."

Margaret strained to see him, but the night hid him securely.

"Wait!" she called carefully. "I don't want you to go away like that; it 's simply that this is too risky." She paused. "I 'd better come down to you," she said.

She could not tell what he answered, whether joy or demurral, for she drew her head in at once, and then opened the door and went out to the corridor.

It was good to be doing something, and to have to do with one whose sympathies were not strained. She went lightly and noiselessly down the wide stairs, and recognized again, with a smile, the secret aspect of the hall in the dark hours. There was a thread of light under the door of Dr. Jakes' study, and within that locked room the dutiful small clock was still ticking off the moments as stolidly as though all moments were of the same value. The outer door was closed with a mighty lock and a great iron key, and opened with a clang that should have brought Dr. Jakes forth to inquire. But he did not come, and she went unopposed out to the stoep under the metallic rustle of its dead vines.

She was going swiftly, with her velvet-shod feet, to that distant part of it which was under the broad light of her window, when the Kafir appeared before her so suddenly that she almost ran into him.

"Oh." She uttered a little cry. "You startled me."

"I 'm sorry," he answered.

"You ought n't to be here," Margaret said, "because it 's dangerous. But I am glad to see you."

"That 's good of you," he said. "I got Paul's message. I had to come. I had to see you once more,

and besides, he said you were—in trouble. About me?''

''Oh, yes,'' said Margaret. ''No end of trouble, all about you. An anonymous letter, notice to quit, pity and smiles, two suitors, one with intentions which were strictly dishonorable, and so on. And the simple truth is, I don't care a bit.''

''Oh, Lord!'' said the Kafir.

They were standing close to the wall, immersed in its shadow and sheltered from the wind that sighed above them and beside them and made the vines vocal. Neither could see the other save as a shadowy presence.

''I don't care,'' said Margaret, ''and I refuse to bother about it. I 've got to go, of course, and I don't like the feeling of being kicked out. That rankles a little bit, when I relax the strain of being superior and amused at their littleness. But as for the rest, I don't care.''

''It 's my fault,'' said the Kafir quietly. ''It 's all my fault. I knew all the time what the end of it would be; and I let it come. There 's something mean in a nigger, Miss Harding. I knew it was there well enough, and now it shows.''

''Don't,'' said Margaret.

There fell a pause between them, and she could hear his breathing. She remembered the expression on Ford's face when he had questioned her as to whether she did not experience a repulsion at a Kafir's proximity to her, and tried now to find any such aversion in herself. They stood in an intimate nearness, so that she could not have moved from her place without

touching him; but there was none. Whoever had it for a pedestal of well and truly laid local virtues, she had it not.

"This is good-by, of course," said the Kafir, in his pleasant low tones. "I 'll never see you again, but I 'll never forget how good and beautiful you were to me. I must n't keep you out here, or there are a hundred things I want to say to you; but that 's the chief thing. I 'll never forgive myself for what has happened, but I 'll never forget."

"There 's nothing you need blame yourself for," said Margaret eagerly. "It 's been worth while. It has, really. You 're somebody and you 're doing something great and real, while the people in here are just shams, like me. Oh," she cried softly; "if only there was something for me to *do.*"

"For you," repeated the Kafir. "You must be—what you are; not spoil it by doing things."

"No," said Margaret. "No. That 's just chivalry and nonsense. I want something to do, something real. I want something that *costs*—I don't care what. Even this silly trouble I 'm in now is better than being a smiling goddess. I want—I want—"

Her mind moved stiffly and she could not seize the word she needed.

"It would be wasting you," Kamis was saying. "It would be throwing you away."

"I want to suffer," she said suddenly. "Yes—that 's what I want. You suffer—don't you? That woman in Capetown will have to suffer; everybody who really does things suffers for it; and I want to."

"Do you?" said Kamis, with a touch of awkwardness. "But—what woman in Capetown do you mean?"

"Oh, you must have heard," said Margaret impatiently. "She married a Kafir; it 's been in the papers."

"Yes," he said, "I remember now."

"I told them all, in here, a long time ago, that in some city of the future there would be a monument to her, with the inscription: 'She felt the future in her bones.' But while she lives they 'll make her suffer; they 'll never forgive her. I wish I could have met her before I go."

There was a brief pause. "Why?" asked Kamis then, in a low voice.

"Why? Because she 'd understand, of course. I 'd like to talk to her and tell her about you. Don't you see?" Margaret laughed a little. "I could tell her about it as though it were all quite natural and ordinary, and she 'd understand."

She heard the Kafir move but he did not reply at once.

"Perhaps she would," he said. "However, you 're not going to meet her, so it does n't matter."

"But," said Margaret, puzzled at the lack of responsiveness in his tone and words, "don't you think she was splendid? She must have known the price she would have to pay; but it did n't frighten her. Don't you think it was fine?"

"Well," Kamis answered guardedly; "I suppose she knew what she was about."

"Then," persisted Margaret, "you don't think it was fine?"

She found his manner of speaking of the subject curiously reminiscent of Ford.

Kamis uttered an embarrassed laugh. "Well," he

said, "I 'm afraid I 'm not very sympathetic. I suppose I 've lived too long among white people; my proper instincts have been perverted. But the fact is, I think that woman was—wrong."

"Oh," said Margaret. "Why?"

"There is n't any why," he answered. "It 's a matter of feeling, you know; not of reason. Really, it amounts to—it 's absurd, of course, but it 's practically negrophobia. You can't bring a black man up as a white man and then expect him to be entirely free from white prejudices. Can you?"

"But—" Margaret spoke in some bewilderment. "What 's the use of being black," she demanded, "if you 've got all the snobbishness of the white? That 's the way Mr. Ford spoke about it. He said he could feel all that was fine in it, but he would n't speak to such a woman. I thought that was cruel."

"Oh, I don't know," said Kamis.

"Another time," said Margaret deliberately, "he asked me whether it did n't make my flesh creep to touch your hand."

"He thought it ought to?"

"Yes. But it does n't," said Margaret. "How does your negrophobia face that fact? Does n't it condemn me to the same shame as the woman in Capetown? Or does it make exceptions in the case of a particular negro?"

"I said I did n't reason about it," replied Kamis. "I told you what I felt. You asked me and I told you."

"I wish you had n't," said Margaret. "I thought that you at any rate—"

She broke off at a quick movement he made. A sud-

den sense came to her that they two were no longer alone, and, with a stiffening of alarm, she turned abruptly to see what had disturbed him. Even as she turned, she lifted her hand to her bosom with a premonition of imminent disaster.

At the head of the steps that led down to the garden, and in the dim light of the half-open front door, a figure had appeared. It came deliberately towards them, with one hand lifted holding something.

"Hands up, you boy!" it said. "Up, now, or I 'll—"

By the door, the face was visible, the unhappy, greedy, Punchinello features that Margaret knew as those of the policeman. Its hard eyes rested on the pair of them over the raised revolver that threatened the Kafir.

The driving mists returned to beat her back from the spectacle; she was helpless and weak. Warmth filled her throat, chokingly; an acrid taste was in her mouth. She took two groping steps forward and fell on the flags at the policeman's feet and lay there.

From a window over their heads, there came the gurgle of Fat Mary's rich mirth.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was the scream of Mrs. Jakes that woke Ford, when, hearing unaccountable noises and attributing them to the doctor, she went to the hall and was startled to see in the doorway the figure of the Kafir, with his hands raised strangely over his head, as though he were suspended by the wrists from the arch, and behind him the shadowy policeman, with his revolver protruded forward into the light. She caught at her heart and screamed.

Ford found himself awake, leaning up on one elbow, with the echo of her scream yet in his ears, and listening intently. He could not be certain what he had heard, for now the house was still again; and it might have been some mere incident of Jakes' transit from the study to his bed, into which it was better not to inquire. But some quality in the cry had conveyed to him, in the instant of his waking, an impression of sudden terror which he could not dismiss, and he continued to listen, frowning into the dark.

His room was over the stoep, but at some distance from the front door, and for a while he heard nothing. Then, as his ears became attuned to the night's acoustics, he was aware that somewhere there were voices, the blurred and indistinguishable murmur of people talking. They were hardly audible at all; not a word transpired; he knew scarcely more than that the stillness of the night was infringed. His curiosity quick-

ened, and to feed it there sounded the step of a booted foot that fell with a metallic clink, the unmistakable ring of a spur. Ford sat upright.

A couple of moments later, some one spoke distinctly. "Keep those hands up," Ford heard, in a quick nasal tone; "or I 'll blow your head off."

Ford thrust the bedclothes from his knees and got out of bed. He lifted the lower edge of the blind and leaned forth from the open window. Below him the stone stoep ran to right and left like a gray path, and a little way along it the light in the hall, issuing from the open door, cut across it and showed the head of the wide steps. Beyond the light, a group of dark figures were engaged with something. As he looked, the group began to move, and he saw that Mrs. Jakes came to the side of the door and stood back to give passage to four shuffling Kafirs bearing the stretcher which was part of the house's equipment. There was somebody on the stretcher, as might have been seen from the laborious gait of the bearers, but the thing had a hood that withheld the face of the occupant as they passed in, with Mrs. Jakes at their heels.

Two other figures brought up the rear and likewise entered at the doorway and passed from sight. The first, as he became visible in the gloom beyond the light, was dimly grotesque; he seemed too tall and not humanly proportioned, a deformed and willowy giant. Once he was opposite the door, his height explained itself; he was walking with both arms extended to their full length above his head and his face bowed between them. Possibly because the attitude strained him, he went with a gait as marked as his posture, a measured and ceremonial step as though he were walking a slow

minuet. The light met him as he turned in the doorway and Ford, staring in bewilderment, had a momentary impression that the face between the raised arms was black. He disappeared, with the last of the figures close behind him, and concerning this one there was no doubt whatever. It revealed itself as a trooper of the Mounted Police, belted and spurred, his "smasher" hat tilted forward over his brows, and a revolver held ready in his hand, covering the back of the man who walked before him.

"Here," ejaculated Ford, gazing at the empty stoep where the shadow-show had been, with an accent of dismay in his thoughts. The affair of Margaret and the Kafir leaped to his mind; all that had occurred below might be a new and poignant development in that bitter comedy, and but for a chance he might have missed it all.

He was quick to make a light and find his dressing-gown and a pair of slippers, and he was knotting the cord of the former as he passed out to the long corridor and went swiftly to the head of the stairs, where the lamp that should light Dr. Jakes to his bed was yet burning patiently.

The stretcher was already coming up the staircase and he paused and stood aside to make room for it. The four Kafirs were bringing it up head first, treading carefully and breathing harshly after the manner of the Kafir when he is conscious of eyes upon him. Behind them followed Mrs. Jakes, shepherding them up with hushing noises. A gray blanket covered the form in the stretcher with limp folds.

The Kafirs saw Ford first and acknowledged his presence with simultaneous grins. Then Mrs. Jakes saw

him and made a noise like a startled moan, staring up with vexed, round eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Ford," she exclaimed faintly. "Please go back to bed. It 's—it 's three o'clock in the morning."

Beyond and below her was the hall, in which the lamp had now been turned up. Ford looked past her impassively, and took in the two men who waited there, the Kafir, with his raised arms—trembling now with the fatigue of keeping them up—and the saturnine policeman with his revolver. The stretcher had come abreast of him and he bent to look under the hood. The bearers halted complaisantly that he might see, shifting their grips on the poles and smiling uneasily.

Margaret's face had the quietude of heavy lids closed upon the eyes and features composed in unconsciousness. But the mouth was bloody, and there were stains of much blood, bright and dreadful, on the white linen at her throat. For all that Ford knew what it betokened, the sight gave him a shock; it looked like murder. They had broken her hair from its bonds in lifting her and placing her in the stretcher and now her head was pillowed on it and its disorder made her stranger.

Mrs. Jakes was babbling nervously at him.

"Mr. Ford, you really must n't. I wish you 'd go back to bed. I 'll tell you about it in the morning, if you 'll go now."

Ford motioned to the Kafirs to go on.

"Where's the doctor?" he demanded curtly.

"Oh," said Mrs. Jakes, "I 'll see to all that. Mr. Ford, it 's *all right*. You 're keeping me from putting her to bed by standing talking like this. Don't you believe me when I say it 's all right? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Is he in the study?" asked Ford.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Jakes. "But *I 'll* tell him, Mr. Ford. I—I—promise I will, if only you 'll go back to bed now. I will really."

Ford glanced along the corridor where the Kafirs had halted again, awaiting instructions from Mrs. Jakes. There was a picture on the wall, entitled "Innocence"—early Victorian infant and kitten—and they were staring at it in reverent interest.

"Better see to Miss Harding," he said, and passed her and went down to the hall. She turned to see what he was going to do, in an agony of alertness to preserve the decency of the locked study door. But he went across to speak to the policeman, and she hurried after the Kafirs, to get the girl in bed and free herself to deal with the demand for the presence of the doctor.

The Kafir stood with his back to the wall, near the big front door, closer to which was the trooper, always with the revolver in his hand and a manner of watching eagerly for an occasion to use it. Ford went to them, knitting his brows at the spectacle. The prisoner saw him as a slim young man of a not unusual type in a dressing-gown, with short tumbled hair; the policeman, with a more specialized experience, took in the quality of his manner with a rapid glance and stiffened to uprightness. He knew the directness and aloofness that go to the making of that ripe fruit of our civilization, an officer of the army.

"Have n't you searched him for weapons?" demanded Ford.

"No," said the policeman, and added "sir," as an afterthought.

Ford stepped over to the Kafir and passed his hands

down his sides and across his breast, feeling for any concealed dangers about his person.

"Nothing," he said. "You can handcuff him if you want to, but there 's no need to keep him with his hands up. It 's torture—you hear?"

"Yes, sir," responded the policeman again. "Put them down," he bade his prisoner.

Kamis, with a sigh, lowered his hands, wincing at the stiffness of his cramped arms.

"Thank you," he said to Ford, in a low voice. "I 've had them up—it must be half an hour."

"Well, you 're all right now," responded Ford, with a nod.

He tried the study door but it was locked and there was no response to his knocks and his rattling of the handle.

"Jakes," he called, several times. "I say, you 're wanted. Jakes, d' you hear me?"

Kamis and the trooper watched him in silence, the latter with his bold, unhappy features set into something like a sneer. They saw him test the strength of the lock with a knee; it gave no sign of weakness and he stood considering on the mat. An idea came to him and he went briskly, with his long stride, to the front door.

"I say," called the Kafir as he went by.

Ford paused. "Well?"

"In case you can't rouse him," said the Kafir, "you might like to know that I am a doctor—M. B., London."

"Are you?" said Ford thoughtfully. "You 're Kamis, are n't you?"

"Yes," answered the Kafir.

"I 'll let you know if there 's anything you can do," said Ford.

The contrast between the Kafir's pleasant, English voice and his negro face was strange to him also. But stranger yet, he could not in the presence of the contemptuous policeman speak the thing that was in his mind and tell the Kafir that he was to blame for the whole business. The voice, the address, the manner of the man were those of his own class; it would have been like quarreling before servants.

"Thank you," said the Kafir, as Ford went out to the stoep.

The sill of the study window was only three feet above the ground, a square of dull light filtering through curtains that let nothing be seen from without of the interior of the room. Ford wasted no more time in knocking and calling; he drew off a slipper and using it as a hammer, smashed the glass of the window close to the catch. Half the pane went crashing at the first blow, and the window was open. He threw a leg over the sill and was in the room.

A bracket lamp was burning on the wall and shooting up a steady spire of smoke to the ceiling, where a thick black patch had assembled and was shedding flakes of smut on all below it. The slovenliness of the smoking lamp was suddenly an offense to him, and before he even looked round he went across and turned the flame lower. It seemed a thing to do before setting about the saving of Margaret's life.

The room was oppressively hot with a sickening closeness in its atmosphere and a war of smells pervading it. The desk had whisky bottles, several of them, all partly filled, standing about its surface, with a water jug, a syphon and some glasses. Papers and a book or two had their place there also, and liquor had been spilt

on them and a tumbler was standing on the yellow cover of a copy of "Mr. Barnes of New York." A collar and a tie lay on the floor in the middle of the room and near them was a glass which had fallen and escaped breakage. Dr. Jakes was in the padded patient's chair; it had its back to the window, and at first Ford had imagined with surprise that the room was empty. He looked round wonderingly, till his eyes lighted on the top of the doctor's blond, childish head, showing round the chair.

Dr. Jakes had an attitude of extreme relaxation. He had slipped forward on the smooth leather seat till his head lay on one of the arms and his face was upturned to the smirched ceiling. His feet were drawn in and his knees protruded; his hands hung emptily beside him. The soot of the lamp had snowed on him copiously, dotting his face with black spots till he seemed to have broken out in some monstrous plague-rash. His lips were parted under his fair mustache, and the eyes were closed tight as if in determination not to see the ruin and dishonor of his life. He offered the spectacle of a man securely entrenched against all possible duties and needs, safe through the night against any attack on his peace and repose.

"Jakes," cried Ford urgently, in his ear, and shook him as vigorously as he could. "Jakes, you hog. Wake up, will you."

The doctor's head waggled loosely to the shaking and settled again to its former place. It was infuriating to see it rock like that, as though there were nothing stiffer than wool in the neck, and yet preserve its deep tranquillity. Ford looked down and swore. There was no help here.

He unlocked the door and threw it open. In the hall the Kafir and the policeman were as he had left them.

"Come in here," he ordered briefly.

The Kafir came, with the trooper and the revolver close at his back. The latter's eye made notes of the room, the glasses, the doctor, all the consistent details; and he smiled.

"You 're a doctor," said Ford to the Kafir. "Can you do anything with this?"

"This" was Dr. Jakes. Kamis made an inspection of him and lifted one of the tight eyelids.

"I can make him conscious," he answered, "and sober in a desperate sort of fashion. But he won't be fit for anything. You must n't trust him."

"Will he be able to doctor Miss Harding?" demanded Ford.

"No," answered Kamis emphatically. "He won't."

"Then," said Ford, "what the deuce are we to do?"

The Kafir was still giving attention to Dr. Jakes, and was unbuttoning the neck of his shirt. He looked up.

"If you would let me see her," he suggested, "I 've no doubt I could do what is necessary for her."

Ford ran his fingers through his short stiff hair in perplexity.

"I don't see what else there is to do," he said, frowning.

The trooper had not yet spoken since he had entered the room. He and his revolver had had no share in events. He had been a part of the background, like the bottles and the soot, forgotten and discounted. Not even his prisoner, whose life hung on the pressure of his trigger-finger, had spent a glance on him. But at

Ford's reply to the suggestion of the Kafir he restored himself to a central place in the drama.

"There will be none of that," he remarked in his drawling nasal voice.

Both turned towards him, the Kafir to meet the pistol-barrel pointing at his chest. The trooper's mouth was twisted to a smile, and his Punchinello face was mocking and servile at once.

"None of what?" demanded Ford.

"None of your taking this nigger into women's bedrooms. He 's my prisoner."

"I 'll take all responsibility," said Ford impatiently.

The trooper's smile was open now. He had Ford summed up for such another as Margaret, a person who held lax views in regard to Kafirs and white women. Such a person was not to be feared in South Africa.

"No," he said. "Can't allow that. It is n't done. This nigger 'll stay with me."

"Look here," said Ford angrily. "I tell you—"

"You look here," retorted the other. "Look at this, will you?" He balanced the big revolver in his fist. "That Kafir tries to get up those stairs, and I 'll drill a hole in him you could put your fist in. Understand?"

He nodded at Ford with a sort of geniality more inflexibly hostile than any scowls.

Ford would have answered forcibly enough, but from the doorway came a wail, and he looked up to see Mrs. Jakes standing there, with a hand on each doorpost and her small face, which he knew as the shopwindow of the less endearing virtues, convulsed with a passion of alarm and horror. At her cry, they all started round towards her, with the single exception of Dr. Jakes, who lay in his chair with his face in that direction already, and was

not stirred at all by her appearance on the scene that had created itself around him.

"O-o-oh," she cried. "Eustace—after all I 've done; after all these years. Why did n't you lock the door, Eustace? And what will become of us now? O-oh, Mr. Ford, I begged you to go to bed. And the Kafir to see it, and all. The disgrace—o-o-h."

The tears ran openly down her face; they made her seem suddenly younger and more human than Ford had known her to be.

"Oh, come in, Mrs. Jakes," he begged. "Come in; it 's—it 's all right."

"All right," repeated Mrs. Jakes. "But—everybody will know, soon, and how can I hold up my head? I 've been so careful; I 've watched all the time—and I 've prayed—"

She bowed her face and wept aloud, with horrible sobs.

Ford was at the end of his wits. While he pitied Mrs. Jakes, Margaret might be dying in her room, under the bland and interested eyes of Fat Mary. He turned swiftly to the Kafir.

"Could you prescribe if I told you what she looked like?" he asked, in a half-whisper. "Could you do anything in that way?"

"Perhaps." The Kafir was quick to understand. Even in the urgency of the time, Ford was thankful that he had to deal with a man who understood readily and replied at once, a man like himself.

"Let me pass, Mrs. Jakes," he said, and made for the stairs.

As soon as he had gone, the trooper advanced to the desk and laid hands on a bottle and a glass. He mixed

himself a satisfactory tumbler and turned to Mrs. Jakes.

"The ladies, God bless 'em," he said piously, and drank.

Kamis, looking on mutely, saw the little woman blink at her tears and try to smile.

"Don't mention it," she murmured.

She came into the room and examined Dr. Jakes, bending over him to scan his tranquil countenance. There was nothing in her aspect of wrath or rancor; she was still submissive to the fate that stood at the levers of her being and switched her arbitrarily from respectability to ruin. She seemed merely to make sure of features in his condition which she recognized without disgust or shame.

"Would you please just help me?" she asked, looking up at the policeman, very politely, with her hands on the doctor's shoulders.

"Charmed," declared the policeman, with an equal courtesy, and aided her to raise the drunken and unconscious man to a more seemly position in his chair. It was seemlier because his head hung forward, and he looked more as if he were dead and less as if he were drunk.

"Thank you," she said, when it was done. "It is—it is quite a fine night, is it not? The stars are beautiful. There is whisky on the desk—very good whisky, I believe. Won't you help yourself?"

"You 're very good," said the trooper, cordially, and helped himself.

Ford came shortly. He ignored Mrs. Jakes and the trooper entirely and spoke to the Kafir only. His manner made a privacy from which the others were excluded.

"I say," he said, with a manner of trouble. "She 's still in a faint. Very white, not breathing much, and rather cold. She looks bad."

The Kafir nodded. "You could n't take her temperature, of course," he said. "There had n't been any fresh hemorrhage?"

"No," replied Ford. "I asked Fat Mary. She was there, and she said there 'd been no blood. I say—is it very dangerous?"

He was a layman; flesh and blood—blood particularly—were beyond his science and within the reach only of his pity and his fear. He had stood by Margaret's bed and looked down on her; he had bent his ear to her lips to make sure that she breathed and that her white immobility was not death. His hand had felt her forehead and been chilled by the cold of it; and he had tried inexpertly to find her pulse and failed. Fat Mary, holding a candle, had illuminated his researches, grinning the while, and had answered his questions humorously, till she realized that she was in some danger of being assaulted; and then she had lied.

He made his appeal to the Kafir as to a man of his own kind.

"I 'm afraid it 's not much use," he said—"what I can tell you, I mean. But do you think there 's much danger?"

Kamis shook his head. "There should n't be," he answered. "I wish I could see her. Cold, was she? Yes; temperature subnormal. I could cup,—but you could n't. Do you think you could make a hypodermic injection, if I showed you how?"

"I could do any blessed thing," declared Ford, fervently.

"Digitalin and adrenalin," mused Kamis. "He won't have those, though. Do you know if he 's got any ergotin?"

"He has," replied Ford. "He shoved some into me. Mrs. Jakes—ergotin? where is it?"

Mrs. Jakes was leaning on the back of the chair which contained the doctor. She had recovered from the emotion which had convulsed and unbalanced her at the discovery of the study's open door. She looked up now languidly, in imitation of Margaret's manner when she was not pleased with matters.

"Really, you must ask the doctor," she said. "I could n't think of—ah—disposing of such things."

Kamis had not waited to hear her out. Already he was overhauling the drawers of the desk for the syringe. Ford aided him.

"Is this it?" he asked, at the second drawer he opened.

"Thank God," ejaculated Kamis. He could not help sending a glance of triumph at Mrs. Jakes.

"Now attend to me," he said to Ford. "First I 'll show you how to inject it. Give me your arm; can you stand a prick?"

"Go ahead," said Ford; "slowly, so that I can watch."

"Take a pinch of skin like this," directed the Kafir, closing his forefinger and thumb on a piece of Ford's forearm. "See? Then, with the syringe in your hand, like this, push the needle in—like this. See?"

"I see."

"Well, now do it to me. Here 's the place."

The arm he bared was black brown, full and muscu-

lar. Ford took the syringe and pinched the smooth warm skin.

"In with it," urged the Kafir. "Don't be afraid, man. Now press the plunger down with your forefinger. See? Go on, can't you? You must n't mess the business upstairs. Do it again."

"That 's enough," said Ford.

Drops of blood issued from the puncture as he withdrew the needle, and he shivered involuntarily. It had been horrible to press the point home into that smooth and rounded arm; his own had not bled.

"Mind now," warned the Kafir. "You must run it well in. And now about the drug."

He was minute in his instructions and careful to avoid technical phrases and terms of art. He took the syringe and cleaned and charged and gave it to Ford.

"Don't funk it," was his final injunction. "This is nothing. There may be worse for you to do yet."

"I won't funk it," promised Ford. "But—" he appealed to the Kafir with a shrug of deprecation—"but is n't it a crazy business?"

It was like a swiftly-changing dream to him. The hot and dirty room, with the Kafir busy and thoughtful, the malevolent trooper and his revolver, the sprawl of the doctor and his slumberous calm and Mrs. Jakes groping through the minutes for a cue to salvation, were unconvincing even when his eyes dwelt on them. They had not the savor of reality. Six paces away was the hall, severe and grand, with its open door making it a neighbor of the darkness and the stars. Then came the vacant stairs and the long lifeless corridors running between the closed doors of rooms, and the light leaking

out from under the door of Margaret's chamber. Through such a variety one moves in dreams, where things have lost or changed their values and nothing is solid or immediate, and death is not troublous nor life significant.

Fat Mary was resting in Margaret's armchair when he pushed open the door and came in, carrying the syringe carefully with its point in the air. She rose hastily, fearful of a rebuke.

"Miss Harding wake up yet?" Ford asked her.

"No. Missis sleep all-a-time," replied Fat Mary. "She plenty quiet, all-'e-same dead."

"Shut up," ordered Ford, in a harsh whisper. "You 're a fool."

Fat Mary sniffed in cautious defiance and muttered in Kafir. Since her duties had lain about Margaret's person, she had become unused to being called a fool. She pouted unpleasantly and stood watching unhelpfully as Ford went to the bedside.

The blood had been washed away and there was nothing now to suggest violence or brutality. The girl lay on her back in the utter vacancy of unconsciousness; the face had been wiped clean of all expression and left blank and void. Mrs. Jakes had known enough to remove the pillows, which were in the chair Fat Mary had selected for her ease, and the head lay back on the level sheet with the brown hair tumbled to each side of it. Ford, looking down on her, was startled by a likeness to a recumbent stone figure he had seen in some church, with the marble drapery falling to either side of it as now the bedclothes fell over Margaret Harding. It needed only the crossed arms and the kneeling angel to

complete the resemblance. The idea was hateful to him, and he made haste to get to the work he had to do in order to break away from it.

The sleeve of the nightgown had soft lace at the wrist and a band of lace inserted higher up; softness and delicacy surrounded her and made his task the harder. The forearm, when he had stripped the sleeve back, was cool and silk-smooth to his touch, slender and shining. His fingers almost circled its girth; it was strangely feminine and disturbing. A blue vein was distinct in the curve of the elbow, and others branched at the wrist where his finger could find no pulse.

Fat Mary forgot her indignation in her curiosity, and came tiptoeing across the floor, holding a candle to light him, and stood at his shoulder to watch. Her big ridiculous face was gleeful as he took up the syringe; she knew a joke when she saw one.

Ford pinched the white skin with thumb and forefinger as he had been bidden and touched it with the point of the needle. The point slipped and was reluctant to enter; he had to take hold firmly and thrust it, like a man sewing leather. The girl's hand twitched slightly and fell open again and was passive. He felt sickish and feeble and had to knit himself to run the needle in deep and depress the plunger that deposited the drug in the arm. Over his shoulder Fat Mary watched avidly and grinned.

He drew the sleeve down again and laid the arm back in its place. He passed a hand absently over his forehead and found it damp with strange sweat, and he was conscious of being weary in every limb as though he had concluded some extreme physical effort. He looked carefully at the unconscious girl, seeking for signs and indi-

ces which he should report to Kamis. The likeness of the marble figure did not recur to him; his thoughts were laborious and slow.

He woke Mr. Samson on his way downstairs, invading his room without knocking and shaking him by the shoulder. Mr. Samson snorted and thrust up a bewildered face to the light of the candle. His white mustache, which in the daytime cocked debonair points to port and starboard, hung down about his mouth and made him commonplace.

"What the devil 's up?" he gasped, staring wildly. "Oh, it 's you, Ford."

"Get up," said Ford. "There 's the deuce to pay. That Kafir 's arrested—Kamis, you know; Miss Harding 's had a bad hemorrhage and Jakes is dead drunk. I want you to go to Du Preez's and send a messenger for another doctor. Hurry, will you?"

"My sainted aunt," exclaimed Mr. Samson, in amazement. "You don't say. I 'll be with you in a jiffy, Ford. Don't you wait."

He threw a leg over the edge of the bed, revealing pyjamas strikingly striped, and Ford left him to improvise a toilet unwatched.

The trooper was talking to Mrs. Jakes in the study when Ford returned there. He had relieved himself of his hat, and his big head, on which the hair was scant, was naked to the lamp. He had found himself a chair at the back of the desk, and reclined in it spaciously, with his half-empty tumbler at his elbow. The Kafir still stood where Ford had left him, his eyes roving gravely over the room and its contents. The trooper looked up as Ford came in, lifting his saturnine and aggressive features with a smile. He had drunk

several glasses in a quick succession and was already thawed and voluble.

"Well," he said loudly. "How 's interestin' patient? 'S well 's can be expected—what? Did n't express wish to thank med'cal adviser in person, I s'pose?"

Ford bent a hard look on him.

"I 'll attend to you in good time," he said, with meaning. "For the present you can shut up."

He turned at once to the Kafir and began to tell him what he had seen and done, while the other steered him with brief questions. The trooper gazed at them with a fixed eye.

"Shup," he said, to Mrs. Jakes. "Says I can shup—for the present. Supposin' I don't shup, though."

He drank, with a manner of confirming by that action a portentous resolution, and sat for some minutes grave and meditative, with his bitter, thin mouth sucked in. He never laid down the big revolver which he held. Its short, businesslike barrel rested on the blue cloth of his knee, and the blued metal reflected the light dully from its surfaces.

"Is it dangerous?" Ford was asking. "From what I can tell you, do you think there 's any real danger? She looks—she looks deadly."

"Yes, she would," replied the Kafir thoughtfully. "I think I 've got an idea how things stand. As long as that unconsciousness lasts, there 'll be no more hemorrhage, and there 's the ergotin too. If there 's nothing else, I don't see that it should be serious—more serious, that is, than hemorrhages always are."

"You really think so?" asked Ford. "I wish you could see her for yourself, and make certain. Perhaps presently that swine with the revolver will be drunk enough to go to sleep or something, and we might manage it."

The Kafir shook his head.

"If it were necessary, the revolver would n't stop me," he said. "But as it is—"

"What?"

"Oh, do you think it would make things better for Miss Harding if you took *me* into her bedroom? You see what has happened already, because she has spoken to me from time to time. How would this sound, when it was dished up for circulation in the dorps?"

Ford frowned unhappily. He did not want to meet the mournful eyes in the black face.

"You think," he began hesitatingly—"you think it —er—it would n't do?"

"You were here when the other story came out," retorted Kamis. "Can you remember what you thought then?"

"Oh, I was a fool of course," said Ford; "but, confound it, I did n't think any harm."

"Did n't you? But what did everybody think? Is n't it true that as a result of all that was said and thought Miss Harding has to risk her life by returning to England?"

"No, it would n't do, I suppose," said Ford. "Between us we 've made it a pretty tough business for her. We 're brutes."

The thick negro lips parted in a smile that was not humorous.

"At a little distance," said Kamis, "say, from the other side of the color line, you certainly make a poor appearance."

Mr. Samson made his entry with an air of coming to set things right or know the reason.

"Well, I 'll be hanged," he exclaimed in the doorway, making a sharp inspection of the scene.

He had got together quite a plausible equivalent for his daily personality, and had not omitted to make his mustache recognizable with pomade. A Newmarket coat concealed most of his deficiencies; his monocle made the rest of them insignificant.

Mrs. Jakes sighed and fidgeted.

"Oh, Mr. Samson," she said. "What can I say to you?"

"Say 'good-morning,' " suggested Mr. Samson, with his eye on Jakes. "Better send for the 'boys' to carry him up to bed, to begin with—what? Well, Ford, here I am, ready and waiting. This the fellow, eh?"

His arrogant gaze rested on the Kafir intolerantly.

"This is Kamis," said Ford. "Dr. Kamis, of London, by the way. He is treating Miss Harding at present."

"Eh?" Mr. Samson turned on him abruptly. "You 've taken him up there, to her room?"

"No," said Ford. "Not yet."

"See you don't, then," said Mr. Samson strongly. "What you thinkin' about, Ford? And look here, what 's your name!"—to the Kafir. "You speak English, don't you? Well, I don't want to hurt your feelin's, you know, but you 've got to understand quite plainly—"

Kamis interrupted him suavely.

"You need n't trouble," he said. "I quite agree with you. I was just telling Mr. Ford the same thing."

"Were you, by Jove," snorted Mr. Samson, entirely unappeased. "Pity you did n't come to the same conclusion a month ago. You may be a doctor and all that; I 've no means of disprovin' what you say; but in so far as you compromised little Miss Harding, you 're a black cad. Just think that over, will you? Now, Ford, what d' you want me to do?"

There was power of a sort in Mr. Samson, the power of unalterable conviction and complete sincerity. In his Newmarket coat and checked cloth cap he thrust himself with fluency into the scene and made himself its master. He gave an impression of din, of shouting and tumult; he made himself into a clamorous crowd. Mrs. Jakes trembled under his glance and the trooper blinked servilely. Ford, concerned chiefly to have a messenger despatched without delay, bowed to the storm and gave him his instructions without protest.

"Mind, now," stipulated Mr. Samson, ere he departed on his errand; "no takin' the nigger upstairs, Ford. There 's a decency in these affairs."

The trooper nodded solemnly to the departing flap of the Newmarket tails, making their exit with a Newmarket *aplomb*.

"Noble ol' buck," he observed, approvingly. "Goo' style. Gift o' the gab. Here 's luck to him."

He gulped noisily in his glass, spilling the liquor on his tunic as he drank.

"Knows nigger when he sees 'im," he said. "Frien' o' yours?"

"Mr. Samson," replied Mrs. Jakes seriously, "is a *very* old friend."

"Goblessim," said the trooper. "Less 'ave anurr."

Kamis and Ford regarded one another as Mr. Samson left them and both were a little embarrassed. Plain speaking is always a brutality, since it sets every man on his defense.

"I 'm sorry there was a fuss," said Ford uncomfortably. "Old Samson 's such a beggar to make rows."

"He was right," said Kamis; "perfectly right. Only—I did n't need to be told. I 've been cursing myself ever since I heard that the thing had come out. It 's my fault altogether—and I knew it long before the row happened, and I let it go on."

Ford nodded with his eyes on the ground.

"You could hardly—order her off," he said.

"That was n't it," answered Kamis. "Man, I was as lonely as a man on a raft, and I jumped at the chance of her company now and again. I sacrificed her, I tell you. Don't try to make excuses for me. I won't have them. Go up and see how she is. What are we talking here for?"

"God knows," said Ford drearily. "What else is there to do? We 've both wronged her, have n't we?"

There was no change in Margaret; she was as he had left her, pallid and motionless, a temptation to death.

Fat Mary was asleep in the armchair, gross and disgustful, and he woke her with the heel of his slipper on her big splay foot. She squeaked and came to life angrily and reported no movement from Margaret. He had an impulse to hit her, she was so obviously prepared to say anything he seemed to require and she was so little like a woman. It was impossible in reason and sentiment to connect her with the still, fragile form

on the bed, and he had to exercise an actual and conscious restraint to refrain from an openhanded smack on her bulging and fatuous countenance. He could only call her wounding names, and he did so. She drooped her lower lip at him piteously and again he yearned to punch her.

There was no change to report to Kamis, who nodded at his account and spoke a perfunctory, "All right. Thanks." The trooper sat in a daze, scowling at his boots; Mrs. Jakes was lost in thought; the doctor had not moved. Ford fidgeted to and fro between the desk and the door for a while and finally went out to the stoep and walked to and fro along its length, trying to realize and to feel what was happening.

He knew that he was not appreciating the matter as a whole. He was like a man dully afflicted, to whom momentary details are present and apparent, while the sum of his trouble is uncomprehended. He could dislike the apprehensive and timidly presumptuous face of the trooper, pity Mrs. Jakes, distaste Mr. Samson's forceful loudness, smell the foulness of the study and wonder at the Kafir; but the looming essential fact that Margaret lay in a swoon on her bed, lacking the aid due to her and in danger of death in a dozen forms—that had been vague and diffused in his understanding. He had not known it passionately, poignantly, in its full dreadfulness.

He told himself the facts carefully, going over them with a patient emphasis to point them at himself.

"Margaret may die; it 's very likely she will, with only a fool like me to see how she looks. I never called her Margaret till to-day—but it 's yesterday now. And here 's this damned story about her, which

every one knows wrongly and adds lies to when he tells it. It would look queer on the stage—Kamis doctoring her like this. But the point is—she may die."

The sky was full of stars, white and soft and misty, like tearful eyes, and the Southern Cross, in which he had never been able to detect anything like a cross, rode high. He could not hold his thoughts from wandering to it and the absurdity of calling a mere blotch like that a cross. Heaps of other stars that did make crosses—neat and obvious ones. The sky was full of crosses, for that matter. Astronomers were asses, all of them. But the point was, Margaret might die.

"That you, Ford?"

Mr. Samson was coming up the steps and with him were Christian du Preez and his wife.

"These good people are anxious to help," explained Mr. Samson. "Very good of 'em—what? And young Paul 's gone off on a little stallion to send Dr. Van Coller. Turned out at the word like a fire engine and was off like winkin'. Never saw anything smarter. If the doctor 's half as smart he 'll be here in four hours."

"That 's good," said Ford.

"And Mrs. du Preez 'll stay with Miss Harding an' do what she can," said Mr. Samson.

"I 'll do any blessed thing," declared Mrs. du Preez with energy.

Mr. Samson stood aside to let his companions enter the house before him. He whispered with buoyant force to Ford.

"A chaperon to the rescue," he said. "We 've got a chaperon, and the rest follows. You see if it don't."

There was a brief interview between Mrs. du Preez and the Kafir under the eyes of the tall Boer. Mr. Samson had already informed them of the situation in the study, and they were not taken by surprise, and the Kafir fell in adroitly with the tone they took. Ford thought that Mrs. du Preez displayed a curious timidity before the negro, a conspicuous improvement on her usual perky cocksureness.

"Just let me know if there is any change," Kamis said to her. "That is all. If she recovers consciousness, for instance, come to me at once."

"I will," answered Mrs. du Preez, with subdued fervor.

There seemed nothing left for Ford to do. Mrs. du Preez departed to her watch, and it was at least satisfactory to know that Fat Mary would now have to deal with one who would beat her on the first occasion without compunction. Mr. Samson and the Boer departed to the drawing-room in search of a breathable air, and after an awkward while Ford followed them thither.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Samson, as he appeared. "Here you are. You 'd better try and snooze, Ford. Been up all night, have n't you?"

"Pretty nearly," admitted Ford. "I could n't sleep, though."

"You try," recommended Mr. Samson urgently. "Lie down on the couch and have a shot. You 're done up; you 're not yourself. What d' you think, Du Preez? He was nearly takin' that nigger up to Miss Harding's room. What d' you think of that, eh?"

He was sitting on the music stool, an urbane and adequate presence.

The Boer shook his head. "That would be bad," he said seriously. "He is a good nigger—*ya!* But better she should die."

Ford laughed wearily as he sat down. "That was his idea," he said.

He leaned back to listen to their talk. Sleep, he felt, was far from him. Margaret might die—that had to be kept in mind. He heard them discuss the Kafir stupidly, ridiculously. It was pothouse talk, the chatter of companionable fools, frothing round and round their topic. Their minds were rigid like a pair of stiffened corpses set facing one another; they never reached an imaginative hand towards the wonder and pity of the matter. And Margaret—the beautiful name that it was—Margaret might die.

Half an hour later, Mr. Samson slewed his monocle towards him.

"Sleepin' after all," he remarked. "Poor devil—no vitality. Not like you an' me, Du Preez—what?"

Ford knew he had slept when the Boer woke him in the broad daylight.

"The doctor is here," said Christian. "He says it is all right. He says—she has been done right with. She will not die."

"Thank God," said Ford.

Mr. Samson was in the room. The daylight showed the incompleteness of his toilet; he was a mere imitation of his true self. His triumphant smile failed to redeem him. The bald truth was—he was not dressed.

"Everything 's as right as rain," he declared, wagging his tousled white head. "Sit where you are, my boy; there 's nothing for you to do. Dr. Van Coller had an infernal thing he calls a motor-bicycle,

and it brought him the twenty-two miles in fifty minutes. Makes a noise like a traction engine and stinks like the dickens. Got an engine of sorts, you know, and goes like anything. But the point is, Miss Harding 's going on like a house on fire. Your nigger-man and you did just the right thing, it appears."

"Where is he?" asked Ford.

"The nigger-man?"

Mr. Samson and the Boer exchanged glances.

"Look here," said Mr. Samson; "Du Preez and I had an understanding about it, but don't let it go any further. You see, after all that has happened, we could n't let the chap go to gaol. No sense in that. So the bobby being as drunk as David's sow, I had a word with him. I told him I did n't retract anything, but we were all open to make mistakes, and—to cut it short—he 'd better get away while he had the chance."

"Yes," said Ford. "Did he?"

"He did n't want to at first," replied Mr. Samson. "His idea was that he had to clear himself of the charge on which he was arrested. Sedition, you know. All rot, of course, but that was his idea. So I promised to write to old Bill Winter—feller that owes me money—he 's governor of the Cape, or something, and put it to him straight."

"He will write to him and say it is lies," said the Boer. "He knows him."

"Know him," cried Mr. Samson. "Never paid me a bet he lost, confound him. Regular old welcher, Bill is. Van Coller chipped in too—treated him like an equal. And in the end he went. Van Coller says he 'd like to have had his medical education. I say, what 's that?"

A sudden noise had interrupted him, a sharp report from somewhere within the house. The Boer nodded slowly, and made for the door.

"That policeman has shot somebody," he said.

Dr. Jakes waked to the morning light with a taste in his mouth which was none the more agreeable for being familiar. He opened his hot eyes to the strange disarray of his study, the open door and the somnolent form of the policeman, and sat up with a jerk, almost sober. He stared around him uncomprehending. The lamp burned yet, and the room was stiflingly hot; the curtains had not been put back and the air was heavy and foul. He got shakily to his feet and went towards the hall. His wife, with coffee cups on a tray, was coming down the stairs. She saw him and put the tray down on the table against the wall and went to him.

"Well, Eustace?" she said tonelessly. "What is it now?"

He cleared his burning throat. "Who opened the door?" he asked hoarsely.

She shook her head. "I don't know," she answered. "It doesn't matter—we're ruined at last. It's come, Eustace."

He made strange grimaces in an endeavor to clear his mind and grasp what she was saying. She watched him unmoved, and went on to tell him, in short bald sentences of the night's events.

"Dr. Van Coller will be down presently," she concluded. "He'll want to see you, but you can lock your door if you like. He's seen *me* already."

He had her meaning at last. He blinked at her

owlishly, incapable of expressing the half-thoughts that dodged in his drugged brain.

"Poor old Hester," he said, at last, and turned heavily back to his study.

Mrs. Jakes smiled in pity and despair, and took up her tray again. She thought she knew better than he how poor she was.

He slammed the door behind him, but he did not trouble to lock it. Something he had seen when he opened his eyes stuck in his mind, and he went staggeringly round the untidy desk, with its bottles and papers, to where the policeman sprawled in a chair with his Punchinello chin on his breast. His loose hands retained yet the big revolver.

"He 'll come to it too," was Dr. Jakes' thought as he looked down on him. He drew the weapon with precaution from the man's hand.

He stood an instant in thought, looking at its neat complication of mechanism and then raised it slowly till the small round of the muzzle returned his look. His face clenched in desperate resolution. But he did not pull the trigger. At the critical moment, his eye caught the lamp, burning brazenly on the wall. He went over and turned it out.

"Now," he said, and raised the revolver again.

CHAPTER XIX

UPON that surprising morning when Mr. Samson, taking his early constitutional, was a witness to the cloud that rode across the sun and presently let go its burden of wet to fall upon the startled earth in slashing, roaring sheets of rain, there stood luggage in the hall, strapped, locked, and ready for transport.

"Gad!" said Mr. Samson, breathless in the front door and backing from the splashes of wet that leaped on the railing of the stoep and drove inwards. "They 'll have a wet ride."

He flicked at spots of water on the glossy surface of his gray coat and watched the rain drive across and hide the Karoo like a steel-hued fog. The noise of it, after months of sun and stillness, was distracting; it threshed vehemently with uproar and power, in the extravagant fashion of those latitudes. It was the signal that the weather had broken, justifying at length Mrs. Jakes' conversational gambit.

She came from the breakfast-room while he watched, with the wind from the open door romping in her thin skirts, and stood beside him to look out. They exchanged good mornings.

"Is n't it wet?" said Mrs. Jakes resourcefully. "But I dare say it 's good for the country."

"Rather," agreed Mr. Samson. "It 'll be all green

before you know it. But damp for the travelers—what?''

''They will have the hood on the cart,'' replied Mrs. Jakes.

She was not noticeably changed since the doctor's death, three weeks before. Her clothes had always been black, so that she was exempt from the gruesome demands of custom to advertise her loss in her garments. The long habit of shielding Jakes from open shame had become a part of her; so that instead of abandoning her lost position, she was already in the way of canonizing him. She made reverential references to his professional skill, to his goodness, his learning, his sacrifices to duty. She looked people steadily and defiantly in the eyes as she said so, and had her own way with them. The foundations were laid of a tradition which presented poor Jakes in a form he would never have recognized. He was in his place behind the barbed wire out on the veld, sharing the bed of little Eustace, heedless that there was building for him a mausoleum of good report and loyal praise.

''Hate to see luggage in a house,'' remarked Mr. Samson, as they passed the pile in the hall on their way to the breakfast-room. ''Nothing upsets a house like luggage. Looks so bally unsettled, don't you know.''

''Things *are* a little unsettled,'' agreed Mrs. Jakes civilly. ''What with the rain and everything, it doesn't seem like the same place, does it?''

She gave a tone of mild complaint to her voice, exactly as though a disturbance in the order of her life were a thing to be avoided. It would not have been

consistent with the figure of the late Jakes, as she was sedulous to present it, if she had admitted that the house and its routine, its purpose, its atmosphere, its memories, the stones in its walls and the tiles on its roof, were the objects of her living hate. She was already in negotiations for the sale of it and what she called "the connection," and had called Mr. Samson and Ford into consultation over correspondence with a doctor at Port Elizabeth, who wrote with a typewriter and was inquisitive about balance-sheets. Throughout the consequent discussions she maintained an air of gentle and patient regret, an attitude of resigned sentiment, the exact manner of a lady in a story who sells the home of her ancestors to a company promoter. Even her anxiety to sell Ford and Mr. Samson along with the house did not cause her to deflect for an instant from the course of speech and action she had selected. There were yet Penfolds in Putney and Clapham Junction, and when the sale was completed she would see them again and rejoin their congenial circle; but her joy at the prospect was private, her final and transcendent secret.

Nothing is more natural to man than to pose; by a posture, he can correct the crookedness of his nature and be for himself, and sometimes for others too, the thing he would be. It is the instinct towards protective coloring showing itself through broadcloth and bombazine.

Mr. Samson accepted his coffee and let his monocle fall into it, a sign that he was discomposed to an unusual degree. He sat wiping it and frowning.

"Did I tell you," he said suddenly, "that—er—that Kafir 's going to look in just before they start?"

Mrs. Jakes looked up sharply.

"You mean—that Kamis?" she demanded. "He 's coming *here?*"

"Ye–es," said Mr. Samson. "Just for a minute or two. Er—Ford knows about it."

"To see Miss Harding, I suppose?" inquired Mrs. Jakes, with a sniff.

"Yes," replied Mr. Samson again. "It is n't my idea of things, but then, things have turned out so dashed queer, don't you know. He wrote to ask if he might say good-by; very civil, reasonable kind of letter; Ford brought it to me an' asked my opinion. Could n't overlook the fact that he had a hand in saving her life, you know. So on my advice, Ford wrote to the feller saying that if he 'd understand there was going to be no private interview, or anything of that kind, he could turn up at ten o'clock an' take his chance."

"But," said Mrs. Jakes hopefully, "supposing the police—"

"Bless you, that 's all right," Mr. Samson assured her. "The police don't want to see him again. Seems that old Bill Winter—you know I wrote to him? —seems that old Bill went to work like the dashed old beaver he is, and had Van Zyl's head on a charger for his breakfast. The Kafir-man 's got a job of some sort, doctorin' niggers somewhere. The police never mention him any more."

"Well," said Mrs. Jakes, "I can't prevent you, of course, from bringing Kafirs here, Mr. Samson, but I 've got my feelings. When I think of poor Eustace, and that Kafir thrusting himself in—well, there!"

Mr. Samson drank deep of his coffee, trying vaguely,

to suggest in his manner of drinking profound sympathy with Mrs. Jakes and respect for what she sometimes called the departed. Also, the cup hid her from him.

It was strange how the presence of Margaret's luggage in the hall pervaded the house with a sense of impermanence and suspense. It gave even to the breakfast the flavor of the mouthful one snatches while turning over the baffling pages of the timetable. Ford, when he came in, was brusk and irresponsive, though he was not going anywhere, and Margaret's breakfast went upstairs on a tray. Kafir servants were giggling and whispering up and down stairs and were obviously interested in the leather trunks. A house with packed luggage in it has no character of a dwelling; it is only a stopping-place, a minister to transitory needs. As well have a coffin in the place as luggage ready for removal; between them, they comprise all that is removable in human kind.

"Well," said Mr. Samson to Ford, attempting conversation; "we 're goin' to have the place to ourselves again. Eh?"

"You seem pleased," replied Ford unamiably.

"I 'm bearin' up," said Mr. Samson. "You seem grieved, though."

"That," said Ford, with venom, "is because I 'm being bored."

"The deuce you are." Mr. Samson was annoyed. "I don't want to talk to you, you know. Sulk all you want to; does n't affect me. But if you could substitute a winnin' smile for the look you 're wearin' at present, it would be more appetizin'."

"Er—the rain seems to be drawing-off, I think," remarked Mrs. Jakes, energetically. "It might be quite fine by-and-by. What do you think, Mr. Samson?"

Mr. Samson, ever obedient to her prompting, made an inspection of the prospect through the window. But his sense of injury was strong.

"There are things much more depressing than rain," he said, rancorously, and occupied himself pointedly with his food.

Ford made his apology as soon as they were free from Mrs. Jakes. She had much to do in the unseen organization of the departure, and apologized for leaving them to themselves. It was another adjunct of the luggage; not within the memory of man had inmates of the Sanatorium sat at table without Mrs. Jakes.

"Sorry," said Ford then, in a matter-of-fact way.

"Are you?" said Mr. Samson grudgingly. "All right."

And that closed the incident.

Soon after breakfast, when the stoep was still uninhabitable and the drawing-room unthinkable and the hall uncongenial, Margaret came downstairs, unfamiliar in clothes which the Sanatorium had not seen before. Mrs. Jakes made mental notes of them, gazing with narrow eyes and lips moving in a soundless inventory. She came down smiling but uncertain.

"I didn't know it could rain," was her greeting. "Did you see the beginning of it? It was wonderful —like an eruption."

"I saw it," said Mr. Samson. "I got wet in it. It 'll be cool for your drive to the station, even if it 's a bit damp."

"There 's still half an hour to wait before the cart comes," said Margaret. "Where does one sit when it 's raining?"

"One does n't," said Mr. Samson. "One stands about in draughts and one frets, one does."

"Come into the drawing-room," said Ford briefly.

Margaret looked at him with a smile for his seriousness and his manner of one who desires to get to business, but she yielded, and Mr. Samson ambled in their wake, never doubting that he was of their company. Ford, holding the door open for Margaret, surprised him with a forbidding scowl.

"We don't want *you,*" he whispered fiercely, and shut the affronted and uncomprehending old gentleman out.

The drawing-room was forlorn and very shabby in the cold light of the rainy day and the tattoo of the rain-splashes on its window. Margaret went to the hearth where Dr. Jakes had been wont to expiate his crimes, and leaned her arm on the mantel, looking about the apartment.

"It 's queer," she said; "I shall miss this."

"Margaret," said Ford.

She turned to him, still smiling. She answered nothing, but waited for him to continue.

"I wanted to tell you something," he went on steadily. "You know I love you, don't you?"

"Yes," she answered slowly. "You—you said so."

"I said it because I do," he said. "Well, Dr. Van Coller was here yesterday, and when he had done with you, I had a word with him. I wanted to know if I could go Home too; so he came up to my room and made an examination of me, a careful one."

Margaret had ceased to smile. "Yes," she said. "Tell me: what did he say?"

"He said No," replied Ford. "I must n't leave here. He was very clear about it. I 've got to stay."

The emphasis with which he spoke was merely to make her understand; he invited no pity for himself and felt none. He was merely giving information.

"But," said Margaret,—"never? It is n't as bad as *that,* is it?"

"He could n't tell. He is n't really a lung man, you know. But it does n't make any real difference, now you 're going. Two years or ten years or forever—you 'll be away among other people and I 'll be here and the gap between us will be wider every day. We 've been friends and I had hopes—nothing cures a chap of hoping, not even his lungs; but now I 've got to cure myself of it, because it 's no use. I would n't have told you, Margaret—"

"Yes, you would," interrupted Margaret. "You would n't have let me go away without knowing, since you—you love me."

"That 's it, exactly." He nodded; he had been making a point and she had seen it. "I felt you were entitled to know, but I can't say why. You understand, though, don't you?"

"Yes," she said. "I understand."

"I knew you would," he answered. "And you won't think I 'm whining. I 'm not. I 'm so thankful that we 've been together and understood each other and that I love you that I don't reckon myself a loser in the end. It 's all been pure gain to me. As long as I live I shall be better off for it; I shall live on it always and never let any of it go. If I never

see you again, I shall still be to the good. But perhaps I shall. God knows."

"Oh, you will," cried Margaret. "You 're sure to."

He smiled suddenly. "That 's what I tell myself. If I get all right, it 'll be the easiest thing in the world. I 'll come and call on you, wherever you happen to be, and send in my card. And if I 'm not going to get well, I shall have to know it sooner or later, and then, if you 'd let me, I 'd come just the same.

"I should n't expect anything," he added quickly. "Not a single thing. Don't be afraid of that. Just send in my card, as I said, and see you again and talk to you, and call you Margaret. I would n't cadge; you could trust me not to do that, at least."

"You must get well and then come," said the girl softly. "And if you call me Margaret, I will call you—"

She stopped. "I never heard your Christian name," she said.

"Just John," he answered, smiling. "John—not Jack or anything. I will come, you can be sure. Either free or a ticket-of-leave, I 'll come. And now, say good-by. I must n't keep you any longer; I 've hurt old Samson's feelings as it is. Good-by, Margaret. You 'll get well in Switzerland, but you won't forget the Karoo, will you? Good-by."

"I won't forget anything," said Margaret, with eyes that were bright and tender. "Good-by. When your card comes in, I shall be ever so glad. Good-by."

There was a fidgety interval before the big cart drove up to the house, its wheels rending through the gritty mud and its horses steaming as though they had been

boiled. Mr. Samson employed each interlude in the talk to glare at Ford in lofty offense; he seemed only to be waiting till this dull business of departure was concluded to call him to account. Mrs. du Preez, who had come across in the cart to bid Margaret farewell, was welcome as a diversion.

"Well, where 's the lucky one?" she cried. "Ah, Miss Harding, can't you smell London from here? If you could bottle that smell, with a drop o' fog, a drop o' dried fish and a drop o' Underground Railway to bring out the flavor, you 'd make a fortune, sellin' it to us poor Afrikanders. But you 'll be sniffin' it from the cask in three weeks from now. Lord, I wish it was me."

"You ought to make a trip," suggested Margaret.

"Christian don't think so," declared Mrs. du Preez, with her shrill laugh. "He knows I 'd stick where I touched like a fly in a jam-pot, and he 'd have to come and pull me out of it himself."

She took an occasion to drop a private whisper into Margaret's ear.

"Kamis is outside, waitin' to see you go. He 's talkin' to Paul."

The farewells accomplished themselves. That of Mrs. Jakes would have been particularly effective but for the destructive intrusion of Mrs. du Preez.

"Er—a pleasant voyage, Miss Harding," she said, in a thin voice. "I may be in London soon myself—at Putney. But I suppose we 're hardly likely to meet before you go abroad again."

"I wonder," said Margaret peaceably.

It was then that Mrs. du Preez struck in.

"Putney," she said, in a loud and callous voice, in

itself sufficient to scrape Mrs. Jakes raw. "South the water, eh? But you can easy run up to London from there if Miss Harding sends for you, can't you?"

Kamis came eagerly to the foot of the steps as Margaret came down, and Mr. Samson, with a loud cough, posted himself at the head of them to superintend.

"I am glad you came," said Margaret. "I didn't want to go away without seeing you."

He glanced up at Mr. Samson and the others, a conscientious audience ranged above him, deputies of the Colonial Mrs. Grundy, and smiled comprehendingly.

"Oh, I had to come," he said. "I had to bid you good-by."

There was no change in his appearance since she had seen him last. His tweed clothes were worn and shabby as ever, and still strange in connection with his negro face.

"And I wanted to thank you for what you did for me that night," said Margaret earnestly. "It was a horrible thing, wasn't it? But I hear—I have heard that it has come all right."

Mr. Samson coughed again. Mrs. Jakes, with an elbow in each hand, coughed also.

"All right for me, certainly," the Kafir answered. "They have given me something to do. There 's an epidemic of smallpox among the natives in the Transkei, and I 'm to go there at once. It couldn't be better for me. But you. How about you?"

The Kafir boys who were carrying out the trunks and stacking them under Paul's directions in the cart were eyeing them curiously, and the audience above never wavered in its solemn watch. It was ridiculous and exasperating.

"Oh, I shall do very well," said Margaret, striving to be impervious to the influence of those serious eyes. "You have my address, have n't you? You must write me how you get on."

"If you like," he agreed.

"You must," she said. "I shall be keen to hear. I believed in you when nobody else did, except Paul."

A frightful cough from above did not silence her. She answered it with a shrug. She meant to say all she had to say, though the ground were covered with eavesdroppers.

"I shan't forget our talks," she went on; "under the dam, with Paul's models. You 'll get on now; you 'll do all you wanted to do; but I was in at the beginning, was n't I?"

"You were, indeed," he answered; "at the darkest part of it, the best thing that ever happened to me. And now you 've got to go. I 'm keeping you too long."

Mr. Samson coughed again as they shook hands and came down the steps to assist Margaret into the cart.

"Remember," said the girl; "you must write. And I shall always be glad and proud I knew you. Good-by and good luck."

"Good-by," said the Kafir. "I 'll write. The best of luck."

Paul put his rug over her knees and reached for his whip. The tall horses leaned and started, and the stoep and its occupants, and the Kafir and Mr. Samson, slid back. A thin chorus of "good-bys" rose, and Margaret leaned out to wave her hand. A watery sun shone on them feebly between clouds and they looked like the culminating scene in some lugubrious drama.

When next she looked back, she saw the house against the gray sky, solitary and little, with all the Karoo for its background. It looked unsubstantial and vague, as though a mirage were left over from the months of sun, to be the abode of troubles and perplexities that would soon be dim and remote also. Paul pulled his horses to a standstill that she might see better; but even at that moment fresh rain drummed on the hood of the cart and came threshing about them, blotting the house from view.

"That 's the last of it, Paul," said Margaret. "No more looking back now."

Paul smiled slowly and presently found words.

"When we come to the station," he said, "I will find a Kafir to hold the horses and I will take you to the train. But I will not say much good-by."

"Why not?" inquired Margaret.

"Because soon I am coming to London too," he answered happily, "and I will see you there."

Mr. Samson and Ford were the last to reënter the house. The Kafir had gone off unnoticed, saying nothing; and Mrs. Jakes could not escape the conversational attentions of Mrs. du Preez and was suffering in the drawing-room. The two men stayed to watch the cart till the rain swept in and hid it. Then Mr. Samson resumed his threatful glare at Ford.

"Look here," he said formidably. "What d'you mean by your dashed cheek? Eh?"

"Sorry," said Ford calmly.

Mr. Samson snorted. "*Are* you?" he said. "Well —all right!"

THE END

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